ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

BY

AMY CRUSE

AUTHOR OF
'ENGLISH LITERATURE THROUGH THE AGES'
'SIR WALTER SCOTT' 'CHARLOTTE BRONTË'
'ELIZABETHAN LYRISTS' ETC.

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CHAPTER I: *A Family of Engineers*

THE history of English literature on its biographical side serves to show how few of our great writers have come of a literary stock. In one instance after another the same story is repeated; a strong and virile race, following some active occupation, produces at a certain stage a man or woman who provides it with means of expression; and, though this is probably mere coincidence, the branch of the family thus distinguished has a way of soon afterward dwindling and dying out. Chaucer came of a family of vintners, Shakespeare of a family of yeomen. Sir Walter Scott had behind him a long line of Border 'cattle-lifters.' Thackeray's immediate ancestors were India merchants, George Eliot's were carpenters and builders, and Robert Louis Stevenson's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were engineers. Instances might be multiplied, but these may suffice; and the conclusion seems to be that in the race as well as in the individual, literature, if it is to be strong and living, must be in the closest touch with life.

In Robert Louis Stevenson the conception of a man as the product of forces that had gathered through the long line of his ancestors was peculiarly vivid. He looked back past his more immediate progenitors and saw behind them in the dim distance the figures of certain Highland chiefs of the clan

Macgregor, who, tradition said, were the founders of his race; and he saw the traits of these chiefs perpetuated through the company of "decent, reputable folk, following honest trades," who came after them. "I cannot conceal from myself," he said, "the possibility that James Stevenson in Glasgow, my first authentic ancestor, may have had a Highland alias upon his conscience and a claymore in his back parlour." This James Stevenson had a son, Robert, who became a maltster, and the father of ten children; and one of these, Alan, was Robert Louis' great-grandfather. He left behind him when he died, a widow and a little son two years old, who was to become the most famous of a line of engineers.

Through all these Stevenson traced the gathering up of the 'component parts' that were to coalesce in the making of himself, their descendant. He looked back also over his ancestors on his mother's side, and saw a certain part of himself in that James Balfour, minister of St Giles', Edinburgh, who was one of the divines who withstood James VI in his design of establishing Episcopacy in Scotland; and in that later James Balfour who became Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, and took for his wife one of the clan of the Border Elliots. Through this ancestress Stevenson claims that he has "shaken a spear in the Debateable Land, and shouted the slogan of the Elliots." Her grandson was Lewis Balfour, who became minister of the parish of Colinton, and whom, in his old age, his

own grandson held in reverence and dread for his stately bearing, the cold aloofness of his manner, and his strict views on discipline. "Try as I please," says Robert Louis Stevenson, "I cannot join myself on with the reverend doctor, and all the while, no doubt, and even as I write the phrase, he moves in my blood, and whispers words to me, and sits efficient in the very knot and centre of my being." [1]

But it was not any of these who had the chief voice in deciding what manner of man this descendant of theirs should be. It was a certain 'lamp and oil man' who, at about the time when the future minister of Colinton was a young student at Edinburgh University, lived with his wife and five small children in his shop beside the Tron. He had at that time no connection with the Stevenson family, and his name was the unremarkable name of Thomas Smith. He was, however, not an entirely unremarkable man. He was clear-headed and energetic, and his nature was at once immensely practical and immensely enthusiastic. His ardour for business led him into various commercial projects, and these all prospered. He was no scientist, but his keen, practised intelligence carried him into the scientific paths of invention and discovery. He designed a system of oil lights to supersede the primitive coal fires then used in lighthouses, and as a consequence of this he was, in August 1786, made engineer to the newly formed Board of Northern Lighthouses.

[1] *Memories and Portraits*, "The Manse."

It was about a year after this new appointment had changed the character of Thomas Smith's interests and occupations that he married Mrs Alan Stevenson, of whom something has already been said. Twelve years had passed since the death of her first husband, and during those years she had fought a brave fight with poverty and had striven desperately to give her son Robert such an education as would enable him to become a minister of the Scottish Church. But the lad did not share his mother's ambition. He had no zeal for learning, and though he was not a dunce, he failed to distinguish himself in any way as a scholar. At the time of his mother's marriage the motive power that was to shape his life was yet to seek.

The marriage brought two families together under one roof, and in the household thus formed new forces of influence and attraction were soon at work. Thomas Smith's two eldest daughters, Jean and Janet, gentle, pious, unworldly girls, gravitated naturally toward their gentle, pious, unworldly stepmother, and the three entered upon a mildly busy life, full of church-going and kind deeds, of sanctimonious intimacies and edifying correspondence with devout but unfortunate petitioners. Robert, on the other hand, quickly took fire at the glow of his stepfather's enthusiasm, and the calling of a lighthouse engineer became the one calling in the world for him. The romance of a life so full of adventures in unknown seas, of dangers by storm and shipwreck and savage men, of stern encounters

with the forces of nature, of hardly won victories, took hold on the boy's imagination, and his ambition was fired by the possibility of great achievements. Henceforward his delight in his profession was "strong as the love of woman." At nineteen he had advanced so far as to be appointed to superintend the construction of a lighthouse on the isle of Little Cumbrae in the Firth of Clyde; and from that time his record shows a steady progress from one great work to another. During the summer months of each year he was engaged in the active work of his calling; in the winter he laboured with a zeal that his student days had never known to improve himself in mathematics, chemistry, natural history, agriculture, moral philosophy, and logic, sitting "a bearded man among boys" in the class-rooms of the University of Edinburgh. In 1799, when he was twenty-seven years old, he married his stepfather's daughter, Jean Smith. By this "extraordinary arrangement in which," says his grandson, "it is hard not to suspect the managing hand of a mother," Thomas Smith was brought into blood relationship with the later Stevensons. The marriage was a happy one, though the two had few interests or ideals in common. The husband was a busy, active man of the world, enamoured of his calling and ambitious of gaining distinction in it. He succeeded, and his success raised him to a social sphere higher than that of his fathers, where his associates were men of position and culture. The wife remained what she had always been, a pious,

mild-natured, kindly woman, interested only in her religion, her children, and her home, the natural prey of 'godly' but inefficient servants and tradespeople; yet devotedly loved by the husband and sons who smiled with tender amusement at her small weaknesses.

In 1807 Robert Stevenson succeeded his stepfather as sole engineer to the Board of Northern Lights, and in this capacity he established a kind of patriarchal rule over the lighthouse-keepers and workmen under his authority. He made himself dreaded by his insistence upon exact obedience to the rules that he laid down, and loved for the staunchness with which he upheld the interests of his scattered family and the sympathy he showed with their troubles. The slack lighthouse-keeper who had not brought the appointments of his charge to that perfection of cleanliness and brightness which Mr Stevenson required trembled when the engineer's boat was sighted; and the man who had ideas of his own grumbled at the minuteness of supervision that regulated even his domestic arrangements. But if these men were in trouble, if their sons wanted a helping hand, or if illness had wasted their resources, it was to this stern martinet that they came, with the assurance that he would listen and do his best to help them. At his house in Edinburgh, No. 1 Baxter's Place, any man employed by the Northern Lights was always heartily welcome, and there was a constant coming and going of "odd, out-of-the-way characters,

skippers, light-keepers, masons and foremen of all sorts," greatly to the enjoyment of the family of children who were growing up in that old-fashioned roomy, delightful dwelling. Its long garden, its cellars, its garrets and apple-lofts where yarns heard in the parlour could be thrillingly re-enacted, its high windows, where, with perils of darkness and perils of waters, lights could be planted that shone out over the wide and gloomy spaces of the Calton Hill, made it an entrancing home for a family of boys. The fascination of their father's calling was strong upon the young Stevensons. A sense of the romance of the sea and a realization of the waste and lonely places of the earth were theirs by inheritance.

For thirty-six years Robert Stevenson held his post as engineer to the Board of Northern Lights, and one after another there arose the great light-houses that are connected with his name. His first and his greatest triumph was the Bell Rock Lighthouse, which was completed in 1811. He wrote and published an account of his work, and the book has been recognized by judges as a master-piece of its sort. Once each year he made a tour of inspection of the lights, starting in the Government yacht from Leith and sailing round the northern coast to Greenock. Sir Walter Scott, who, in 1814 joined the party of Commissioners who sailed with Mr Stevenson in the yacht *Pharos*, spoke of him as "the celebrated engineer," and added: "I delight in these professional men of talent; they

always give you some new lights by the peculiarities of their habits and studies, so different from the people who are rounded, and smoothed, and ground down for conversation, and who can say all that every other person says and—nothing more." Robert Stevenson's conversation, as his friends record and his letters go to prove, was certainly not of the order of the commonplace; and it combined, with his striking appearance—his broad shoulders, massive head, grand rugged face and stern eyes—to make him noted and remembered by all who met him.

As his sons grew up three of them, Alan, David, and Thomas, became associated with him in his work. They were enthusiasts of the same fine and steady temper as their father, and when in 1843 his health began to fail and he resigned the position he had held for so long, he was succeeded by his son Alan. For six years after this he went with his son on the annual tour of inspection. In the seventh year the decline in his health was so rapid that his friends tried to persuade him to give up the idea of taking part in the voyage, but he persisted in his intention until, on the very eve of his son's departure, the truth had to be told to him. He was stricken with a mortal illness that would probably bring his life to an end before the cruise could be finished. The old man took the news firmly; he was not afraid of death nor greatly disturbed to know that it was near. "But there was something else that would cut him to the quick—the loss of his cruise, the end

of all his cruising; the knowledge that he had looked his last on Sunburgh, and the wild crags of Skye, and that Sound of Mull, with the praise of which his letters were so often occupied; that he was never again to hear the surf break in Clashcarnock: never again to see lighthouse after lighthouse (all younger than himself and the more part of his own device) open in the hour of dusk their flowers of fire, or the topaz and the ruby interchange on the summit of the Bell Rock. To a life of so much activity and danger, a life's work of so much interest and essential beauty, here came a long farewell." [1]

He died in July 1850, and his three sons were left to carry on his work. Each of them in turn filled the post of engineer to the Board of Northern Lights. Alan, with Thomas working under him, built that "noblest of all extant deep-sea lights," Skerryvore. This was one of the most dangerous and difficult of any of the operations the family had undertaken. "It will be a most desolate position for a lighthouse," Scott had said when he had landed on the Skerryvore rocks during the tour of 1814, "the Bell Rock and Eddystone a joke to it, for the nearest land is the wild island of Tyree, at fourteen miles distance." This great work was completed in 1844, and the brothers always looked upon it as their greatest triumph. Thomas and David Stevenson, working together, "added two—the Chickens and Dhu Heartack—to that small number of man's extreme outposts in the ocean." They

[1] Graham Balfour's *Life*.

erected also no fewer than twenty-seven shore-lights and twenty-five beacons, and they built many harbours. Thomas Stevenson is, however, best known by his inventions and improvements in connexion with the illumination of lighthouses. He perfected the revolving light, and invented the azimuthal condensing system.[1] He wrote several works dealing with the subject, and these gained him much fame among members of his own profession all over the world.

In many respects Thomas Stevenson resembled his father, but he added to the sturdy traits of the resolute and autocratic old man a melancholy, a rare sensitiveness, and a touch of almost painful humility that softened and sweetened his character. No words can describe him so well as those of his son. "He was a man of somewhat antique strain; with a blended sternness and softness that was wholly Scottish and at first somewhat bewildering; with a profound essential melancholy of disposition and (what often accompanies it) the most humourous geniality in company; shrewd and childish; passionately attached, passionately prejudiced; a man of many extremes, many faults of temper, and no very stable foothold for himself among life's troubles. . . . He had never accepted the conditions of man's life or his own character; and his

[1] An arrangement of prisms by which the light proceeding from the flames is allocated in the different azimuths, or directions, in proportion to the distances at which the light requires to be seen by the mariner in those directions.

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Photo J. Patrick

inmost thoughts were ever tinged with the Celtic melancholy. . . . But he found respite from these troublesome humours in his work, in his lifelong study of natural science, in the society of those he loved, and in his daily walks, which now would carry him far into the country with some congenial friend, and now keep him dangling about the town from one old book-shop to another, and scraping romantic acquaintance with every dog that passed. . . . His talk, compounded of so much sterling sense and so much freakish humour, and clothed in language so apt, droll, and emphatic, was a perpetual delight to all who knew him. . . . It was perhaps another Celtic trait that his affections and emotions, passionate as these were, and liable to passionate ups and downs, found the most eloquent expression both in words and gestures. Love, anger, and indignation shone through him, and broke forth in imagery, like what we read of Southern races." [1]

It is not difficult to recognize Robert Louis Stevenson as the son of this man, and he was no less clearly the son of his mother. In 1848 Thomas Stevenson married Margaret Isabella Balfour, daughter of that Lewis Balfour who, as his grandson imagined, may, as he "posted up the Bridges" to his classes in Edinburgh, have passed the "lamp and oil man taking down the shutters from his shop beside the Tron." The young student had grown to be a man, had taken orders, married,

[1] *Memories and Portraits.*

and become a zealous minister of the Scottish church. In 1823 he had come to the parish of Colinton, on the Water of Leith, four miles south-east of Edinburgh, where he was to remain for thirty-seven years. At the manse, as at the house in Baxter Place, there had been thirteen sons and daughters, and these, being grown to manhood and womanhood, had gone out into the world, many of them to strange and far-off countries; so that "letters with outlandish stamps became familiar to the local postman, and the walls of the little chambers brightened with the wonders of the East." [1] Margaret Isabella was the youngest of the family, and the special charge of her elder sister, Jane. She was a beautiful girl, tall, slender, and graceful, and she had a bright, happy temperament that made friends for her wherever she went. From her came Stevenson's gaiety and brilliance, his spirit of adventure, his thirst for new experiences, and the charm by which he won his way to all hearts. "We are all nobly born," he once said; "fortunate those who know it; blessed those who remember." He indeed was nobly born, and he knew it, and remembered.

[1] *Memories and Portraits*, "The Manse."

CHAPTER II: *Childhood*

THOMAS STEVENSON took his wife to a small stone-built house known as No. 8 Howard Place, Edinburgh, which stood on low ground just to the north of the Water of Leith. Here on November 13th, 1850, their son was born. He was called Robert after his grandfather, Robert Stevenson, who had died four months before his birth, and Lewis Balfour after his other grandfather, the minister of Colinton.[1] The child from the beginning was delicate, with a weak chest and a great susceptibility to colds. Even when, in 1857, the family moved to 17 Heriot Row, which was in a less damp and exposed situation, his health did not greatly improve. He has told us of the terrible long nights during which he lay awake coughing continually, praying that sleep or the morning might come to his relief; and he has gratefully recorded how the tender, patient care of his nurse, Alison Cunningham, helped him through those weary hours. "It seems to me that I should have died," he says, "if I had been left there alone to cough and weary in the darkness. How well I remember her lifting me out of bed, carrying me to the window,

[1] In his earliest letters, and down to 1865, Stevenson signed his name 'R. Stevenson.' After that he occasionally used 'R. L. B. Stevenson,' until 1868, when he asked his mother to address him for the future as Robert Lewis. In 1873 he definitely changed to the form he finally adopted—'R. L. Stevenson.' The change from Lewis to Louis was made when he was about eighteen, but the exact date is uncertain.

and showing me one or two lit windows up in Queen Street across the dark belt of gardens; where also, we told each other, there might be sick little boys and their nurses waiting, like us, for the morning." [1] Sometimes the night hours held even greater terrors than these. He has told us in "A Chapter on Dreams" of someone ("no less a person than myself") who from a child was "an ardent and uncomfortable dreamer. When he had a touch of fever at night, and the room swelled, and shrank, and his clothes, hanging on a nail, now loomed up instant to the bigness of a church, and now drew away into a horror of infinite distance and infinite littleness, the poor soul was very well aware of what must follow, and struggled hard against the approaches of that slumber which was the beginning of sorrows. But his struggles were in vain; sooner or later the night-hag would have him by the throat and pluck him strangling and screaming from his sleep. . . . The two chief troubles of his very narrow existence—the practical and everyday trouble of school tasks and the ultimate and airy one of hell and judgment—were often confounded together into one appalling nightmare. He seemed to himself to stand before the Great White Throne; he was called on, poor little devil, to recite some form of words, on which his destiny depended; his tongue stuck, his memory was blank, hell gaped for him; and he would awake, clinging to the curtain-rod with his knees to his chin." Nothing

[1] Graham Balfour's *Life*.

could calm the nervous terror that possessed him save the presence of his father; and Thomas Stevenson, called hurriedly to the bedside of his son, would sit there telling stories, inventing conversations, doing all that tenderness could suggest to soothe the little boy's agonies, until gradually the fit of terror passed. Louis adored his father, who never petted and spoiled him, as his mother and nurse sometimes did, but who was tenderness itself in time of trouble. A word of quiet praise from him made 'Smout'—which was the boy's nickname—wild with joy, and one of his dry comments on some childish exhibition of petulance or vanity was never forgotten.

Stevenson's delicate health during his early years made a regular school training impossible. When he was seven years old he was sent to a preparatory school, but after a few weeks he fell ill, and was withdrawn, and he did not return to school until two years later. In 1861 he was sent to the Edinburgh Academy, the principal school of Edinburgh; and he remained there for a year and a half, attending more or less regularly. His teacher was Mr D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, a famous scholar and teacher, and the author of that delightful book, *Day-dreams of a Schoolmaster*. For one term, while his mother was abroad, he was sent to an English boarding-school in Middlesex. But his school-days left very little mark upon him. His father, he tells us, had a "contempt for all the ends, processes, and ministers of education." He despised

school successes and encouraged his son's natural aversion to school tasks. His mother, indeed, felt differently; and in the journal she kept during these years her son's place in class is carefully noted. But she had few successes to record: Robert Louis Stevenson was undoubtedly an idle and lukewarm scholar.

His true education he received at home, from his mother and his nurse 'Cummie.' They read to him and talked to him and encouraged him to make efforts for himself. He taught himself his letters by looking at the illustrated papers during his recovery from a severe illness, and by the time he was eight years old he could read and write fluently. Even before this he had attempted original composition. When he was only six his uncle David offered a prize to the one among his children and his nephews who should write the best History of Moses. Louis dictated his version to his mother on five successive Sunday evenings, and illustrated her manuscript with drawings of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea carrying unwieldy portmanteaux and smoking huge cigars. A Bible picture book was awarded him as an extra prize. "From that time forward," says his mother, "it was the desire of his heart to be an author." From this ambition he never swerved, though, like the rest of his family, he felt strongly the call to a life of adventure and active effort. He grew up in an atmosphere like that which had so strongly influenced his father. All around him were people whose main interests

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Photo J. Patrick

were concerned with the sea, and whose talk was chiefly of its perils and adventures. Father, uncles, cousins—nearly all were, or aspired to be, lighthouse-builders. All were proud of the triumphs the family had won, and not one was prouder than little Robert Louis. The strength of his desire to be an author is proved in that it entirely conquered the strong hereditary tendency toward the fascinating calling of his fathers; but the effect of this early environment was to be seen in him and in his work to the end.

His early religious training had a far stronger influence upon him than his purely intellectual education. 'Cummie' belonged to the strictest sect of the Presbyterians, and under her care Louis spent, as he tells us, "a Covenanting childhood." He was made to study diligently the Bible, the Shorter Catechism, and the writings of the chief Covenanting divines. "When I was a child," he wrote many years afterward to Mr J. M. Barrie, "and indeed until I was nearly a man, I consistently read Covenanting books. . . . I have been accustomed to hear refined and intelligent critics . . . trace down my literary descent from all sorts of people. Well, laigh i' your lug, sir,—the clue was found. My style is from the Covenanting writers." [1]

He was taught, moreover, that novels, cards, and the theatre were traps set by the devil to catch souls and that the Presbyterian hymns were finer

[1] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.*

than all the songs of the ungodly. He received this doctrine eagerly, and his strictness in applying it exceeded that of his teacher. 'Cummie' did her best to make the religion that she taught attractive to her charge, and although he suffered sometimes from the nervous terrors that attack highly sensitive children, he chiefly associated it with stirring and delightful experiences, grateful to his imagination as well as spiritually uplifting. "It is you that gave me a passion for the drama, Cummie," he once said to his old nurse before a roomful of people. 'Cummie' was astounded and a little indignant. "Me, Master Lou!" she answered, "I never put foot inside a playhouse in my life." "Ay, woman," he responded, "but it was the grand dramatic way ye had of reciting the hymns."

His taste for the drama led to one of the most delightful experiences of his boyhood, which he has described in the paper, "A Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured." "There stands, I fancy, to this day (but now how fallen!) a certain stationer's shop at a corner of the wide thoroughfare that joins the city of my childhood with the sea. . . . In the Leith Walk window, all the year round, there stood displayed a theatre in working order, with a 'forest set,' a 'combat,' and a few 'robbers carousing' in the slides; and below and about, dearer tenfold to me! the plays themselves, those budgets of romance, lay tumbled one upon another. . . . To go within, to announce yourself as an intending purchaser, and, closely watched, be suffered to undo

those bundles and breathlessly devour those pages of gesticulating villains, epileptic combats, bosky forests, palaces and warships, frowning fortresses and prison vaults—it was a giddy joy. . . . And when at length the deed was done, the play selected, and the impatient shopman had brushed the rest into the gray portfolio, and the boy was forth again, a little late for dinner, the lamps springing into light in the blue winter's even, and *The Miller,* or *The Rover,* or some kindred drama clutched against his side—on what gay feet he ran, and how he laughed aloud in exultation! I can hear that laughter still."

But although Robert Louis Stevenson was a town-bred boy his childhood held other joys than those of the town: and although he was an only child he knew something of the special delights that come to those who have brothers and sisters for playfellows. The old manse at Colinton had given up one generation of the children it had reared—all save "Aunt Jane"—"chief of our aunts"—who remained to mother a second generation sent home from distant parts of the world to fill up the empty places. When Louis was sent, as he often was, to recover from a specially severe bout of illness, he found the manse full of cousins. Then began a period of purest and most romantic happiness. The frail, yellow-haired little lad, the spoiled darling of his mother and his nurse, whose delicate beauty seemed to mark him out as a drawing-room pet, became possessed by such a "fury of play" as sent

him to bed utterly exhausted. He could tell such wonderful stories and devise such delightful games that he was acclaimed leader by the universal consent of a loyal and admiring following, and the glory of this position increased his ardour. The manse garden was an ideal playground. It had a lawn that on summer afternoons was "a perfect goblet for sunshine and the Dionysius' ear for a whole forest of bird-songs"; it had delightful groups of laurels in whose shade small boys might lie, gun in hand, and await with all a hunter's pleasing tremors the herd of wild animals that would certainly soon emerge from the neighbouring cover. Along one side ran a gloomy pathway, whose alluring name was "The Witches' Walk," and this lost itself as it approached the stables in the black shade of a mighty yew-tree. A walk down this path was an adventure, and might be depended upon to give the boldest-hearted boy a most enjoyable fit of shivers. But there were higher joys to be attained. The churchyard lay on a level with the top of the garden wall, and the children of the manse might hope, when night was falling, to see the 'Spunkies' playing among the tombstones; or might even, looking through a hole in the wall, spy something that was like a burning eye fixed upon them, and debate among themselves, with the most delicious thrills of shuddering terror, as to whether it was really the eye of a dead man, who was sitting up in his coffin and taking a look at the outer world in this truly extraordinary fashion. Inside the house

there were long, low rooms, admirably adapted for the game of 'tig,' while the dark space behind the dining-room sofa made an ideal bivouac for a lonely hunter. There was Aunt Jane's storeroom, too, whence Albert biscuits and black-currant jelly appeared opportunely just at that hour in the morning when a small boy was beginning to feel that the support given by the porridge at breakfast was failing; and there was the dark, cold, awe-inspiring study, where the grandfather, with his beautiful face and his silver hair, sat writing those sermons that on Sunday he was to deliver from the proud eminence of the pulpit.

Sometimes one of the cousins came to bear the lonely little lad company in his Edinburgh home, and Stevenson recalls with delight the winter of 1856–7, which the only son of his uncle Alan, Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson, spent with him. The months were passed in a "purely visionary state," and there was scarcely one of the ordinary events of the day that did not provide an opportunity for some fantastic 'make-believe.' Robert Alan was almost as brilliant and whimsical as his cousin, and they played delightedly into each other's hands. When they ate their porridge at breakfast Robert Louis sprinkled his with sugar and feigned that it was a country suffering from a disastrous snowstorm; while Robert Alan deluged his with milk and called upon his cousin to watch its gradual destruction by inundation. Their morning walk took them into the wildest regions of the earth, and sometimes

into regions beyond the earth. The tunnel below the Edinburgh railway bridge was for them "Death's dark vale," and they passed it with awed faces, and minds braced to a brave endurance of its terrors; the fields near Howard Place were the "green pastures" of the Psalm, and the pools formed by the Water of Leith its "still waters." But their favourite game of all was the 'Game of Islands.' In this each boy had an island of his own. Robert Alan's was shaped something like Ireland, and was called 'Nosingtonia'; that of Robert Louis "lay like a tip-cat across the paper," and had the more serious name of 'Encyclopædia.' Most marvellous things happened in both these territories. Hurricanes descended upon them, earthquakes rent them, volcanoes attempted to bury them under streams of lava; armies marched against them, hideous monsters haunted them, and mysterious enemies descended upon them from balloons. The boys were never tired of inventing fresh trials for their unfortunate provinces, and this 'Game of Islands' left behind it a permanent interest and delight which had something to do later with the evolution of *Treasure Island.*

Before he was fourteen years old Robert Louis Stevenson had visited with his parents some of the most interesting and beautiful places in England, France, and Italy, but these seem to have made little permanent impression upon him. In none of his many autobiographical papers is there any mention of these journeyings; it was to Scottish scenes

and Scottish people that his thoughts went back in after days. Of these his memories were extraordinarily clear and exact. He was profoundly interested in himself and in his own life; and looking back across the years he loved to watch his own small figure as it travelled on through those early stages of its journey, and to recall what the boy had thought and felt as he walked with his nurse vainly striving "to piece together in words" his "inarticulate but profound impressions." "I seem," he says, "to have been born with a sentiment of something moving in things, of an infinite attraction and horror coupled." It is to this sentiment that the vivid, strenuous quality which marked his life even to its very end is largely due. He walked about the world feeling acutely that he was moving, not among lifeless objects, but among living realities. He met each experience that came to him as a thrilling adventure, and out of the most prosaic and unpromising materials could extract the purest delight. One characteristic instance of this he gives us in his paper, "The Lantern-Bearers." When he was twelve years old he spent an autumn at North Berwick, and it was here, he says, that he "tasted in a high degree the glory of existence." As the dark nights of September came on Louis and his companions bought each for himself a dark lantern. This was fastened to a cricket belt, and the topcoat was buttoned tightly over it. The lanterns "smelled noisomely of blistered tin; they never burned aright, though they would always burn our fingers;

their use was naught; the pleasure of them merely fanciful; and yet a boy with a bull's-eye under his topcoat asked for nothing more." [1] Sometimes several of these 'lantern-bearers' met together in secluded places and held mysterious converse, but this was no real part of the sport. "The essence of this bliss was to walk by yourself in the black night . . . and, deep down in the privacy of your fool's heart, to know you had a bull's-eye at your belt, and to exult and sing over the knowledge." [2]

His whole life was lived in this spirit. Each new day was welcomed with eagerness, for perhaps before it closed it would bring at least one of those great leaps of the heart that are followed by the full throbbing moments which make up man's real existence; the stretches of time that lay between these he regarded, as he once said of his dinner, as a "mere hurried sustentation of the immortal spirit before exposing it to another excitement." To read a new book was, in itself, an event wonderful and soul-stirring. He tells us how, when he was eight years old, he first discovered the pleasure that could be gained by reading a story-book for himself. The shock of that pleasure, he says, will remain in his memory always. A little later another book-adventure came with *The Arabian Nights*, and he tells how he grew "blind with terror" when his clergyman grandfather came in and found him reading the "fat, old, double-columned volume. . . . But instead of ordering the book away, he said he

[1] *Across the Plains*, "The Lantern-Bearers." [2] *Ibid.*

envied me. Ah, well he might." Shakespeare gave him an experience more thrilling, though less pleasant. "One disastrous day of storm, the heavens full of turbulent vapours, the street full of the squalling of the gale, the windows resounding under bucketfuls of rain, my mother read aloud to me *Macbeth*. I cannot say I thought the experience agreeable; I far preferred the ditch-water stories that a child could dip and skip and doze over, stealing at times material for play: it was something new and shocking to be thus ravished by a giant, and I shrank under the brutal grasp." [1]

Nor did this emotional quality fade when he left boyhood behind him. When he was a young man, going through the Edinburgh streets to uncongenial work in a dull office, a vibrant note in the voice of a little boy calling to a dog lingered in his ears during the whole day, and "made me very happy." A clump of gigantic hemlock flowering in a public garden gave him an almost overwhelming sense of tropic grace and splendour, and a talk with a friend—a "good talk," to use his own phrase—heated his heart and his brain and made the whole physical world swim round him "with the colours of the sunset." "I never was bored in my life," he once declared; and though in tracing the history of his life we often find him intensely sad and sometimes we find him discouraged, we never meet him in the mood that doubts that life is supremely worth living.

By 1864 Robert Louis Stevenson's health had

[1] Graham Balfour's *Life*.

greatly improved, and he was able to go more or less regularly to a private school in Frederick Street, Edinburgh, kept by a Mr Thomson. He had, besides, various masters and tutors to help him in his work at home. He learned quickly anything that interested him, but he never really worked at his school tasks, nor cared greatly to attain any school success. His heart was not in his work. "All through my boyhood and youth," he says, "I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket—one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version book would be in my hand to note down the features of the scene or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words." [1] Ever since his literary ambition had been awakened by the memorable *History of Moses* the boy had been thus busy, training for the career he had chosen. He had written epics, tragedies, lyrics, stories, and essays. Some of these had appeared in the magazines that he had a passion for starting and attempting to circulate among his school-fellows and his home-friends. One small pamphlet, called *The Pentland Rising, a Page of History, 1660,* attained the dignity of print. The subject was one upon which his father felt strongly, and probably for this reason rather than for any

[1] *Memories and Portraits,* "A College Magazine."

special literary merits the paper possessed, Mr Thomas Stevenson paid for its publication. Judged, however, as a contribution to literature and not as a schoolboy's essay, its immaturity became so manifest that he soon afterward bought in all the copies he could obtain.

This first appearance in print marks the close of the schoolboy period of Robert Louis Stevenson's life. He was now sixteen, and it was high time, so his father thought, that he should begin to prepare himself for his future profession.

CHAPTER III: *Preparing for a Profession*

IT was one of the great misfortunes of Robert Louis Stevenson's early life that for a long time his family refused to take seriously his determination to be an author. Thomas Stevenson took it for granted that his son would carry on the family tradition and become an engineer. It was true that the boy had shown no aptitude or enthusiasm for the profession, and that his school career, in spite of a certain elusive brilliance that made one feel he ought to do great things, had been disappointing. But of school honours his father thought little, and there was his famous grandfather's example to show that an indifferent, even an idle student might make a keen and efficient engineer.

As soon, therefore, as he left school the lad was entered at Edinburgh University to study for a science degree. He began his work in a spirit unenthusiastic and even rebellious. It seemed to him that he was being forced into a species of confinement in which he must occupy himself with matters infinitely dull and trivial, while the world was simply teeming with beautiful and wonderful things that he longed to investigate. His university, like his school life, had little influence upon the development of his character, though as his essay, *Some College Memories*, shows, he was not without happy recollections of the place where "a certain lean, ugly, idle, unpopular student" yawned through

such lectures as he could not manage to evade, and at last to his own wonder " escaped out of the stage of studentship not openly shamed." The streets of Edinburgh were, to his mind, full of an intellectual stimulus that was lacking in the University class-rooms, and whenever he possibly could he chose to take his lessons in the less confined area. He practised, he says, " an extensive and highly rational system of truantry," so that he profited very little by the teaching the University offered. To induce him to work it was always necessary to kindle his imagination, and there was nothing in the college course that could strike a spark of enthusiasm from him. The boy was dejected and out of heart—foolishly and unreasonably so, perhaps, yet that made his misery none the less. His relations with his father grew strained and unhappy. Thomas Stevenson was puzzled at the son who, possessing, as it seemed certain, rare and unusual gifts, showed such intellectual apathy with regard to the subjects that seemed to the elder man of entrancing interest; and he was inclined to suspect perversity. The son could not conceal his resentment at his own strong prepossessions being entirely set aside, and his life forced to run upon the lines laid down by his father.

Religious difficulties came to complicate matters still further. By this time the religious fervour that had marked Stevenson's boyhood had cooled. An inquiry into the grounds of his faith became necessary, and the ardour of his temperament made this both

full and searching. As a result he felt that he could no longer hold to the tenets of Calvinism. The strong reaction that followed led him to speak of matters of religion in a way that shocked his devout and sensitive parents; and the breach widened.

The summer months, which were largely spent in engineering expeditions with his father, served only to increase the unhappy friction between the two. The open-air life, the adventures of the sea, the new experiences in the wild regions to which his father's duties took him, gave Stevenson the keenest delight. No hardship or danger deterred him from eagerly seeking after those excitements which this mode of life offered. He tells us how, by means of a bribe of five shillings, he induced one of the divers to allow him to descend to the bottom of the sea; and this experience was, he declares, one of the best things he got from his education as an engineer. He was a keen observer of all that interested him, and he never forgot what he saw in these summer excursions; but unfortunately the things that interested him were not the things that interested his father. The grievance was an old one. "On Tweedside, or by Lyme and Manor," he says, "we have spent together whole afternoons—to me, at the time, extremely wearisome; to him, as I am now sorry to think, extremely mortifying. The river was to me a pretty and varied spectacle; I could not see—I could not be made to see—it otherwise. To my father it was a chequer-board of lively

forces, which he traced from pool to shallow with minute appreciation and enduring interest. 'That bank was being undercut,' he might say. 'Why? Suppose you were to put a groin out here, would not the *filum fluminis* be cast abruptly off across the channel? and where would it impinge on the other shore? and what would be the result? Or suppose you were to blast that boulder, what would happen? Follow it—use the eyes that God has given you; can you not see that a great deal of land would be reclaimed upon this side?' It was to me like school in holidays; but to him, until I had worn him out with my invincible triviality, a delight." [1]

During these unhappy, restless years Stevenson was much alone. He loved to walk in solitary places, and, in the 'divine self-pity' natural to youth, to brood over the hardness of his lot. He would stand on the great Edinburgh bridge, watching the trains that passed beneath him, and wishing that one would bear him away out into the world; he would spend hours in the Calton burying-ground, feeding his unhappiness with the thought of the brief space of life granted to man, and chafing under his own forced inactivity. If he had had a friend to whom he could have spoken freely during this period of "acrid fermentation," some of his gloomy humours might have been dispersed. But there was no one. He suffered most acutely from that special form of loneliness which is "a malady most incident to only

[1] *A Family of Engineers.*

sons." He was strongly attracted by one of his University professors, Fleeming Jenkin, but this friendship had not yet reached a confidential stage; and the cousins who had been the companions of his boyhood were scattered and out of reach. His father and mother were willing, even anxious, to receive any friends of his in their house, but their son held aloof. He refused to enter the society of Edinburgh, though many pleasant houses were open to him; and at the few houses where he did visit he was not a great favourite, since the natural charm with which, when he willed, he could always win friends, was hidden by the almost defiant unconventionality of his manner, and the slovenliness of his dress.

Yet he was not without society of a sort. There were certain small public-houses in the poorer quarter of the town where he was well known. When he was tired of wandering about by himself, he would turn into 'The Green Elephant,' 'The Twinkling Eye,' or 'The Gay Japanee,' and sit down in the little sanded kitchen among a company of "seamen, chimney-sweeps, and thieves"—his circle, he explains being "continually changed by the action of the police magistrate." Yet 'Velvet Coat,' as Stevenson was called, was always treated with consideration, even with a certain deference; he was petted by the women, and allowed to do very much as he liked without interference. He usually sat silent among the noisy talkers, writing poems in his penny version book, and observing the company. His father knew nothing of these adventures; had he done so it is

certain that he would have very strongly disapproved. Yet they were, at least in part, the result of his own action. He held the strict notions of old-fashioned Scottish parents, and regarded his son—even after Louis had attained his majority—as a mere irresponsible boy. Therefore Stevenson, during his student days, was allowed half-a-crown a week as pocket money, which allowance was afterward increased to twelve pounds a year. His monthly allowance was usually spent before the day on which he received it was ended, a large part often going to clear off obligations incurred ; and for the rest of the month he got along by forestalling the next payment. It was not that Thomas Stevenson grudged to spend money on his son. Louis was at liberty to order whatever clothes or other necessaries he chose from his parents' tradespeople, and in the matter of holidays he was treated with lavish generosity. But it did not accord with his father's strict ideas of discipline to allow his son the control of any considerable sum, and the boy was, therefore, in a sense, driven to take his recreation where it could be had at a low price. It is probable, however, that his opinions, as much as his poverty, led him into the society he frequented. He was at this time in hot revolt against the established social order, and was indignant at the way in which professing Christians ignored the teaching of the Gospel of St Matthew ; and he delighted in doing anything that would prove his contempt for all the barriers that society had set up between class and class.

Nevertheless it is certain that however dark these years looked in retrospect, they were not wholly miserable. Stevenson spent many happy holidays, sometimes alone and sometimes with the family, at Swanston Cottage, his father's country house, at the foot of the Pentland Hills. He made friends with the country folk, he rode, skated, and fished; he sat and made bad verses by a little pool that was fed with 'a perennial teacupful' from Halkerside; and in winter he spent "long, silent, solitary and lamplit evenings by the fire," renewing his acquaintance with Dumas. In Edinburgh he joined the Speculative Society—of which Sir Walter Scott in his youth had been a distinguished member—and grew very enthusiastic over its proceedings. He was twice elected one of the presidents of the Society, and he read various essays at the meetings of its members.

Still, in spite of all these alleviations, the burden of uncongenial work and thwarted ambition became heavier and heavier. For three and a half years he managed to bear it; then, in desperation, he confessed to his father during a "dreadful evening walk" the repugnance he felt to becoming an engineer, and his irresistible attraction to literature. His father, who, doubtless, was not altogether unprepared for such a declaration, received it with calm and grave kindness. He was keenly disappointed, especially as Louis had, a few days before, read a paper on *A New Form of Intermittent Light* before the Scottish Society of Arts, and had been highly commended for the promise that it showed. Thomas Stevenson had

Swanston Cottage

Photo J. Patrick

perhaps allowed himself to hope that his son's interest in the calling of his fathers was awakening; if so, he did not let his disappointment bring any bitterness into the discussion which now became necessary concerning Louis' future plans. He agreed that the engineering should be given up, but he did not consider it wise that the young man should devote himself entirely to literature. He stipulated, therefore, that Louis should take up the profession of Law. If, after his examinations were passed, he found this uncongenial, the time would not have been wasted, for the course of study would be of considerable value to him in his work as an author; while, if he failed in literature, there would always be his profession to fall back upon. To this arrangement Louis, with a great lightening of heart, agreed.

The worst was now over, and things began to mend. Other causes besides the change of occupation were working to bring Stevenson to a happier and more wholesome state of mind. He says himself that he dates his new departure from three circumstances—natural growth, the coming of friends, and the study of Walt Whitman.

Of his friends the chief was his cousin Bob, who about this time returned to Edinburgh. The two cousins had always been in sympathy, and they resumed at once the close, familiar relations of their boyish days. They talked long and intimately over every subject in their whole range of ideas, and to Louis the relief of disburdening his mind and speaking out all those thoughts and feelings, the

repression of which had become absolutely painful to him, was tremendous. The return of his cousin, he says, wrought an immediate and lasting change in his life. Other friends also, he tells us, he made at this period—Charles Baxter, James Walter Ferrier, and Sir Walter Simpson—all of whom had in a lesser degree an influence upon his life and happiness.

Concerning the influence of Walt Whitman he has spoken fully in a paper contributed to the *Cornhill.* "His book," he says, ". . . should be in the hands of all parents and guardians as a specific for the distressing malady of being seventeen years old. Green-sickness yields to his treatment as to a charm of magic; and the youth, after a short course of reading, ceases to carry the world on his shoulders." [1] And, lastly, Stevenson tells us how the change brought about by natural growth worked in him. "I was never conscious of a struggle, nor registered a vow, nor seemingly had anything to do with the matter. I came about like a well-handled ship. There stood at the wheel that unknown steersman whom we call God." [2]

Work now went on with better heart. Stevenson began his attendance at the University class in Law, and did fairly well, even gaining some distinction. He passed the preliminary examination by virtue of his store of general knowledge and his ready wit rather than the amount of his solid information, and he worked for some months in the office of a firm

[1] *Familiar Studies of Men and Books.*

[2] Graham Balfour's *Life.*

of Writers to the Signet, in order to learn conveyancing. He did not neglect his work, but he was not devoted to it. All his enthusiasm was reserved for his own chosen profession, and he laboured diligently to learn to write, playing "the sedulous ape" to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann. Some of his efforts he showed to his friends, and was in no way dismayed by their very outspoken criticisms. On three occasions he incurred "a more authoritative rebuff" by sending a paper to a magazine, but he accepted these simply as an indication that he was not yet prepared for the work he aspired to do.

With three others of the young members of the 'Spec' he started a magazine, which a firm of booksellers, whose shop adjoined the University buildings was induced to publish. High hopes were entertained of this magazine, which was to bring great profit to all concerned in it. It ran for four months, with quickly diminishing enthusiasm on the part of its proprietors, and died "without a gasp"; whereupon, having had the necessary interview with his father, and paid his share of the expenses, Stevenson told himself that "the time was not yet ripe, nor the man ready," and set himself again to the work of preparation.

1873 marked an epoch in Stevenson's development. Early in the year the misunderstanding with his father reached an acute stage. Stevenson for several years had belonged to a mysterious society

called the S.J.R. The significance of these initials was revealed only to the six members of the Society, and its exact tenets were also held secret; but it was known to advocate generally liberty of thought and freedom from prejudice. In February 1873 a draft of the constitution of the Society came into the hands of the elder Stevenson, who, probably regarding the sentiments it expressed with far more seriousness than such boyish extravagance deserved, showed his displeasure in a manner that awakened an answering resentment in his son. There was a stormy scene, followed by some months of painful estrangement, felt most acutely on both sides.

"The thunderbolt has fallen with a vengeance, now," Stevenson wrote on February 2nd to his friend Charles Baxter. "On Friday night after leaving you, in the course of conversation my father put me one or two questions as to beliefs, which I candidly answered. . . . And now! they are both ill, both silent, both as down in the mouth as if—I can find no simile. . . . They don't see either that my game is not the light-hearted scoffer, that I am not (as they call me) a careless infidel. I believe as much as they do, only generally in the inverse ratio. I am, I think, as honest as they can be in what I hold. I have not come hastily to my views. I reserve, as I told them, many points until I acquire fuller information, and I do not think I am thus justly to be called 'horrible atheist.'" [1]

During the summer of this same year Stevenson

[1] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.*

paid a visit to his cousin, Mrs Churchill Babington, who lived at Cockfield Rectory in Suffolk, and here he made two new friends. The first was Mrs Sitwell, an intimate friend of his cousin's. She became almost at once his confidant and consoler, and his letters to her during the two critical years that followed show how, in a boyish yet not unmanly fashion, he depended upon her for sympathy and guidance. The second was Mr (afterward Sir) Sidney Colvin. Mr Colvin was several years older than Stevenson, and had already gained for himself a considerable literary reputation. He felt at once the charm of the immature, but brilliant, young law student, who expanded so delightfully under the pleasant influences of his cousin's home, and a friendship was formed which lasted to the end of Robert Louis Stevenson's life, and was of the greatest importance both to his career and to his happiness. He returned to Edinburgh in September, and resumed his work with enthusiasm. An essay on "Roads" was sent to the *Saturday Review*, and other work was put in hand; but a severe attack of diphtheria interrupted his activity, and left him weak and dejected. The misunderstanding with his father remained a cause of acutest suffering. He wrote telling Mrs Sitwell of an "awful scene," in which his father had reproached him with cruel and unnatural conduct toward an old man who was ill able to bear it; and of the miserable night he spent afterward, and how he lay awake next morning and listened while his father with a dejected step came downstairs and went out on

some customary before-breakfast errand. And he lay and wished—" O, if he would only *whistle* when he comes in again."

In October Stevenson paid another visit to England, with the purpose of being called to the English Bar, but he was so weakened by illness and worry that almost immediately after his arrival in London he completely broke down. The distinguished physician—Sir Andrew Clark—who was consulted, declared him to be suffering from severe nervous exhaustion, combined with weakness of the lungs, and ordered perfect freedom from work and worry, and a winter in the Riviera. Early in November, therefore, Stevenson started for Mentone.

He had visited the place some years before with his mother, but this was the first time he had undertaken a long journey by himself, and his delight in the new experience partially triumphed over his languor and weariness. But for some weeks after he arrived at Mentone he was in a state to which no effort was possible. He could only bask in the sun and let the days slip by unnoted and unenjoyed, dimly aware that he was in a world of beauty, but capable of receiving only the very faintest of impressions from his surroundings. He wrote long letters to Mrs Sitwell, and told her how the consciousness of his own languid state affected him ; how he went each day to his favourite corner up in the olive yards, and looked upon the fair view down the valley, and on to the blue floor of the sea ; how he watched the shifting colours on the olive leaves and the pleasant

shadows that lay softly on the grass ; but how none of these things moved him. It was little good being sent to the South, he said, unless you take your soul with you, and his was left behind him. His cry after the old pleasures—the thrilling encounters and soul-stirring experiences which he had once enjoyed—is very characteristic of his entire attitude toward life. "'To sit by the sea and to be conscious of nothing but the waves and the sunshine over all your body is not unpleasant ; but I was an Archangel once."

To his young despair it seemed as if he had fallen for ever from this high estate ; but as he grew slowly stronger, the power of thought and of enjoyment began to come back to him. Very soon he was writing that he had found a new friend, to whom he grew daily more devoted—George Sand. George Sand's novels went with him to his sunny corner among the olives, and their sympathetic and friendly tone helped to bring him back from the aloofness of the invalid. He began to take up the dropped threads of his life. He thought over the past few years with their perplexities and misunderstandings, and looking down from the height of his new experience, he saw more clearly where the fault had been. The old difficulties seemed to vanish, and the way lay clear before him. One thing in particular became plain—he could not live much longer in dependence on his father. Large sums of money were being spent upon his stay at Mentone, and this troubled his conscience. Money, he said, was the *atmosphere* of civilized life, and he could not bear

to take the breath out of other people's nostrils. If his friends judged that he would never be able to make a living by literature, literature must be given up; and, much as he hated the idea, he must go into an office, and learn how to earn his bread in some humble fashion. If, on the other hand, he might continue his writing, he would work at it with all his powers. The longing to be up and doing came upon him more strongly than ever, and he was ready to cry out with joy at the least sign that promised recovery. In December he wrote to Mrs Sitwell that he was able to enjoy things and to feel dull occasionally, both of which had been impossible in his previous apathetic state. ". . . O, I should like to recover, and to be once more well and happy and fit for work, to have done for the rest of time with preludings and doubting, and to take hold of the pillars strongly with Samson!"

In the third week of December Colvin came to join him at Mentone, and his recovery in health and spirits went on rapidly. With a friend to share his enjoyment of the lovely Southern land, and to hold with him hour after hour intimate converse on the things of time and the things of eternity, he was perfectly happy. He made friends, too, with some of the people staying at the hotel, and had the new experience of intimate association with two or three delightful children. There was a little American girl named Marie, a sprite of a child, who ran about the hotel, leaping and dancing "simply like a wave." "Both Colvin and I," Stevenson wrote home to his

mother, "have planned an abduction already." There were two Russian children, the youngest, Nelitschka, or 'Nellie,' being "a little polyglot button" of two and a half years, who spoke fragments of six languages. These children soon recognized that the alarmingly thin young man with the bright eyes was not a 'Mädchen,' as his long yellow hair had at first led them to suppose, nor was he a real 'grown-up'; he was just a boy, who by some means or other had escaped from the control of his parents. He was accordingly promptly admitted as a freeman of their society. He played with them, wrote verses to them, and made them presents; and they in return helped him to regain his place among the Archangels. "Kids are what is the matter with me," he wrote to his mother, and to Mrs Sitwell. "Children are certainly too good to be true."

In January he made an attempt to begin work again. He took up an essay on Walt Whitman that had been begun in the previous autumn, and found that he himself had changed so much during the interval that it was like continuing the work of another man. He was not yet strong enough to do much, but by making a start he seemed to bring complete recovery nearer. The letters of this period show that his natural gaiety of spirit was coming back, and his zest of small happenings reviving. There are many jokes about a cloak that Mr Sidney Colvin, who had made a flying visit to England, had been commissioned to buy for him in

Paris. "The price that must be paid for it," he writes to his mother, "is indeed somewhat high," but then his parents will have the satisfaction of thinking that their son possesses simply THE GREATEST vestment in Mentone.

It was partly the cloak that made Mr Andrew Lang, who was then staying in the Riviera, and who called upon Mr Colvin at his hotel, say that Stevenson "looked nothing less than English except Scotch." But even without the cloak Stevenson was often taken for a foreigner, especially by the people he met in his Continental wanderings. He was at different times taken for a Frenchman, a German, and a Pole; and in *An Inland Voyage* he bewails the trials he has suffered through not presenting "a good normal type" of the nation to which he belonged. His chief divergence probably was that the movements of his long thin body had a supple, attractive grace that we are not apt to associate with natives of England or of Scotland. Mr Lang has confessed that the impression he gained at this time of the smooth-faced, long-haired, hectic young man was not entirely favourable; but later on he, like almost all who came to know Robert Louis Stevenson intimately, felt the charm of that wonderfully attractive personality, until criticism gave way to real affection.

Before he left Mentone in April his health seemed quite re-established, and he had finished *Ordered South*,—the brave essay which was the fruit of the victory he had won in the olive gardens among the

hills, and which curiously foreshadows the spirit in which much of his work, throughout his life, was to be done. On his way home he spent several weeks in Paris with his cousin Bob, who had begun work as an art student, and here he was introduced to that Bohemian artist society with which he afterward became so familiar. By the beginning of May he was back in Edinburgh. It was a joyful home-coming, for illness and absence had brought parents and son to a better understanding of each other. Old differences were forgotten, and old grievances laid by. Stevenson settled down again as the son in his father's house, but certain changes had taken place in the position he held. He was now twenty-three years old, and while he had been abroad considerable sums of money had been of necessity placed in his hands. These had been dealt with in a way that gave him a claim to be regarded as a man capable of managing his own financial affairs. It was obviously absurd to think of putting him back to the old position of a schoolboy in receipt of pocket-money; and his father therefore agreed to make him an allowance of eighty-four pounds a year. This, he felt, was wealth; and it made him a free man.

CHAPTER IV: *Wander-Years*

FOR the next four years, though his father's house was still his headquarters, Stevenson spent comparatively little time in Edinburgh. He was, he said, born a 'tramp,' and through all his restless youth the 'tramp' had chafed at being lodged in a comfortable home, and tied down to a daily routine. His recent rise to opulence had been chiefly valued as giving him the means to wander, and he was eager to take advantage of his newly-acquired independence. It is true that he was under agreement to qualify himself for a lawyer, but this involved no very heavy obligations. It kept him in Edinburgh during the winter session of 1874, when he resumed his law classes at the University, and it brought him up for his Final Examination in July 1875. But when this was passed, and he was called to the Scottish Bar, the matter was nearly ended. According to Scottish custom a brass plate bearing his name appeared upon the door of his father's house in Heriot Row; and he shared with three or four other incipient lawyers the services of a clerk, whom, it is said, he did not know by sight. He frequented the Parliament House and lounged about among the young and briefless advocates, just as Sir Walter Scott had done more than eighty years before. He tried to work in the Advocates' Library, but found the society there so disturbing

that he retired to his own room at home. After this he came to the Parliament House no more, and very soon all pretence of his devoting himself to any calling save that of literature was given up.

But even before this time he had made several flights from Edinburgh. In the summer of 1874 he spent a week or two with Colvin at Hampstead, and joined the Savile Club, where he met some of the leading literary men of the day. A yachting tour round the western islands of Scotland with Sir Walter Simpson, a few weeks spent with his parents at Barmouth and Llandudno, and a walking tour in Buckinghamshire, brought him to the winter, when, as has been said, he came back to Edinburgh, to take up his legal studies. The winter is chiefly memorable as having brought him an introduction to Mr W. E. Henley, who was to become one of his dearest friends. It came about through Mr Leslie Stevenson, the editor of the *Cornhill*, who was staying in Edinburgh for some months lecturing to the Royal Society. He knew Stevenson as a contributor to his paper, and had met him at the Savile Club ; and one day he called upon him and took him to visit a patient in the Edinburgh Infirmary. The patient was W. E. Henley. From his boyhood Henley had suffered from a tuberculous disease that had already made necessary the amputation of one foot. The other leg was now threatened, and it was to put himself under the care of the great physician, Mr (afterward Sir

Frederick) Lister that Henley eighteen months before had come to Edinburgh Infirmary.

Stevenson's account of the meeting, given in a letter to Mrs Sitwell, proves that he had not "lived with words" in vain. It is an unforgettable little picture. The big, burly poet was lying in "a little room with two beds, and a couple of sick children in the other bed; a girl came in to visit the children, and played dominoes on the counterpane with them; the gas flared and crackled, the fire burned in a dull, economical way; Stephen and I sat on a couple of chairs, and the poor fellow sat up in his bed with his hair and beard all tangled, and talked as cheerfully as if he had been in a king's palace, or the great king's palace of the blue air." [1]

Thenceforward the two were friends, and during the months that followed Stevenson came back constantly to that unbeautiful room bringing with him piles of "big, yellow books quite impudently French" to shine incongruously under the flaring gaslight and help the brave-hearted invalid through his dreary days. The lonely poet in his almost sordid surroundings touched both Stevenson's heart and his imagination, and he was eager to pour out all that he could command before his new friend. Moreover, he discovered that here was a rare talker, —the best, his cousin Bob excepted, that he had ever met. Henley was a man of strong and commanding personality. In talk he was "a bright,

[1] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.*

fierce adversary" who defended his ground foot by foot, and gave his opponent "full measure of the dust and exertion of battle." There were famous encounters held in that dull hospital room. With Henley, said Stevenson, "you can pass days in an enchanted country of the mind, with people, scenery and manners of its own; live a life apart, more arduous, active and glowing than any real existence; and come forth again when the talk is over, as out of a theatre or a dream, to find the east wind still blowing and the chimney-pots of the old battered city still around you."[1] When the spring came and Henley was able to leave the hospital the two went for drives together through the beautiful country round about Edinburgh, and to the poet who for almost two years had been shut up in his sickroom, the sound of rushing waters and the sight of the country "mad with green" came with a freshness of realization that was almost bewildering. "The look on his face," said his companion, "was wine to me."

For the rest, Stevenson's life in Edinburgh during that winter went on much as it had done in his student days. He worked with fervour at his business as an author, and half-heartedly at his legal studies. He went little into society, and when he did make his appearance, with his long hair, well-worn velveteen jacket, flannel shirt of dismal hue and general air of extreme shabbiness, the good folk of Edinburgh regarded him as anything but a

[1] *Memories and Portraits*, "Talk and Talkers."

credit to their gatherings. He on his side was constant in preferring the streets of Edinburgh to its drawing-rooms. These he loved, and in them his finest adventures were achieved. "There are no stars so lovely as Edinburgh street lamps," he wrote long afterward, in a foreign land. "When I forget thee, Auld Reekie, may my right hand forget her cunning." He still consorted with the waifs and strays of the city, and did numberless small acts of kindness to the poor and the helpless. One evening as he was coming home at about eleven o'clock he found a lost child, a tiny boy of three years old, who only knew that his name was Tommy Murphy, and that his parents lived in something that sounded like Tobago Street. Stevenson carried the child through the streets of Edinburgh for nearly three hours, seeking, with infinite patience and perseverance, for the missing parents. "It was two before I got to bed," he wrote; then added, characteristically, "However, you see, I had my excitement."

In July 1875, just after he had passed his examination, he paid a visit to Paris and was introduced by his cousin Bob to the artists' colony at Barbizon. This "noiseless hamlet" stood deep in the shady groves of Fontainebleau; it had been the home of Millet, who was lately dead; and its whole neighbourhood was filled with traditions of artists and their works. At Barbizon was an inn, known as Siron's, and this had become the headquarters of a company of happy and mostly impecunious young gentlemen, who guarded it carefully from the intrusions of

"Cummie"

Photo J. Patrick

tourists and capitalists. They had trained the innkeeper to give unlimited credit, and to treat the most out-at-elbows artist with no visible effects but his paint-box as an honoured guest; to allow him to remain as long as he chose; not to present him with his bill until he asked for it, and to suffer him, without question or remonstrance, to depart whithersoever he would leaving it unpaid. The hours and ways of the inn were regulated by these young gentlemen's requirements. They rose at what hour they would, found their simple breakfast ready, and went out into the cool, silent shades of the forest to paint, to write, to meditate, to join in merry excursions, or to wander in delightful solitude. At noon and at six o'clock there was a plentiful meal spread for them in the dining-room, whose walls were covered with pictures painted by past and present frequenters of Siron's; and then there was so much eating and drinking and jabbering in French and English that it would have done your heart good, said Stevenson, to have listened at the door. After dinner came a frolic in the dining-room, when the old piano was played and the artists waltzed one with another with great enjoyment if with little grace; or, by the light of guttering candles in the high inn chamber they talked the wild ambitious talk of youth, and jested, with light-hearted laughter, or sometimes took their way to the great city that stood so near their solitudes, and returning at night from its brilliant lamp-lit spaces, passed into "a new forest full of whisper, gloom and fragrance," and

bathed their senses in the "fragrant darkness of the wood." Then back to Siron's, a descent into the cellar for beer or wine, a night of sound and dreamless sleep, and a new day.

Such a life suited Stevenson's tastes exactly, and he came back again and again to the little village to pass his time in "strenuous idleness," to acquire that sense of style with which, he says, the very atmosphere of France is saturated, to dream dreams and to see in visions "the House Beautiful shining upon its distant hill-top." He was probably never happier than among the "solemn groves" of Barbizon and in the other villages scattered throughout the Forest of Fontainebleau. In the summer of 1875 he visited Grez, which he described to his mother as "a pretty and very melancholy village on the plain." It had a low bridge of many arches, which generations of artists had painted, and it had an old tumble-down inn which rivalled Siron's in the warmth and courtesy of the welcome it gave to artists. Stevenson found Grez a "less inspiring place than Barbizon," though he gave it the palm over Cernay, with its "great empty village square," and over Nemours and Moret and Chailly-en-Brière, and a host of others clustering close by.

It was from Barbizon that he started with Sir Walter Simpson, in the summer of 1875, on that walk up the valley of the Loing which was, as he tells in his "Epilogue to an Inland Voyage," untimely cut short by the action of the officials at Châtillon-sur-Loire. He was, he owns, "unwisely dressed."

"On his head he wore a smoking cap of Indian work, the gold lace pitifully frayed and tarnished. A flannel shirt of an agreeable dark hue, which the satirical call black; a light tweed coat made by a good English tailor; ready-made cheap linen trousers and leathern gaiters completed his array." [1] Such an appearance excited the suspicions of the gendarme whom he met, on the third day of the tour, at Châtillon-sur-Loire. He was stopped and politely asked for his papers; and none being forthcoming, he was brought before the commissary, ordered to be detained, conducted to a cellar under the gendarmerie, locked in, and only released upon the arrival of his companion, who had dropped behind on the road. "Here was a man about whom there could be no mistake; a man of unquestionable and unassailable manner, in apple-pie order, dressed not with neatness merely but elegance, ready with his passport at a word, and well supplied with money." [2] His influence sufficed for the release of his comrade, and the two returned by train next day to that "most unfashionable spot in Europe, Barbizon," and at noon were dining in Siron's, telling the story of their misadventure.

After this experience Stevenson set off to join his parents in a stay at Wiesbaden and Homburg, and returned with them to Edinburgh, where he spent the winter and spring, attending, in the perfunctory way that has already been described, to his duties as an advocate of the Scottish Bar. He was absent

[1] *Across the Plains.* [2] *Ibid.*

during a week or two in January on a walking tour in Ayrshire and Galloway, and in the early summer he paid a month's visit to London.

The great event of the year was the canoe voyage that he took with Sir Walter Simpson in September. Sir Walter was an enthusiast and an expert in the art of canoeing. Stevenson had joined his friend in the sport, and, according to his wont, had taken it up with fervour; but in spite of much practice in the Firth of Forth he had attained to no great degree of skill. He was eager for the new experience, however, and the two friends went to Antwerp and started for Brussels, then went on from the French frontier, by the river Oise almost to the Seine. The season, however, was late for such an undertaking. Day after day the rain poured steadily down and the cold winds blew; yet the 'Arethusa' and the 'Cigarette,' as Stevenson and his friend called themselves after their respective canoes, managed to get a great deal of fun out of their "inland voyage." It provided, moreover, excellent material for one of those delightful books of travel, unique in their delicacy of touch, the intimacy of their personal note, and their delicious, unexpected humour by means of which Stevenson first made for himself a name in literature.

"You may paddle all day long; but it is when you come back at night-fall, and look in at the familiar room, that you find Love or Death awaiting you beside the stove; and the most beautiful adventures are not those we go to seek." With these

words Stevenson closed *An Inland Voyage*, which he finished during the following year; and they were probably inspired by the remembrance that he had found his most beautiful adventure waiting for him when he came back to Grez after that voyage was over. He found the inn shaken to its foundations by news of the impending arrival of lady visitors. It was just at this time that the girl students of England and America were beginning to walk calmly into the inns which had long been sacred to the brotherhood of artists, and having by this outrage upon propriety and decorum reduced the French element in the company to a state of bewildered helplessness, were being accepted by the less, or rather the differently, prejudiced Saxon, and establishing for their sex a right to share the amenities of artist life in Fontainebleau. The visitors to Grez turned out to be an American lady with her seventeen-year-old daughter and her little son. The name of the family was Osbourne, and they had come from California in order that the young people might have the advantage of a French education. Mrs Osbourne was an enthusiastic student of art, and had friends in Paris who had advised her to visit Grez. The two ladies are described by Mr W. H. Low, one of the Barbizonian group of artists, as slight and graceful, with delicately moulded features, vivid eyes, and masses of dark hair. They looked, he says, more like two sisters than like mother and daughter.

With Mrs Osbourne Stevenson at once fell in love;

and he did it with the finality and completeness that marked all his actions. Hitherto he seems to have felt slight interest in women, save in those who stood toward him in an almost motherly relation. He was nearly twenty-six years old, and the passion of love had never touched him; nor had he apparently ever sought to gain even that theoretical knowledge of it that might have been considered essential to a young writer's practice of his art. Yet he knew at once that this that he felt for Mrs Osbourne was the real thing, that the Great Adventure had come and must be followed up with a stout and faithful heart.

The first step was readily achieved. It would have been strange indeed if the woman he loved had been almost the only person among those to whom he showed his real self to refuse to love him. But for a time at least the adventure could go no further. Mrs Osbourne, so Stevenson learned, had a husband then living in California, from whom she had separated under painful circumstances. She was unwilling to apply for a divorce out of consideration for the feelings of her own family; so that it seemed likely that this new attachment would be nothing but a source of suffering to her and to Stevenson.

For a time, however, the new element that had thus come into his life filled him with happiness and high spirits. The future, it is true, was overcast, and even the present was not unclouded. He could see little of Mrs Osbourne, and could not feel that his relations with her were assured or satisfactory.

He knew that his parents would look upon the whole matter with great disfavour, and that an estrangement more painful and more lasting than those that had arisen in his younger days was probably at hand. But to his happiness facts mattered always less than feelings; he was, in some directions, a supreme egoist, and the consciousness of this new and wonderful development in his own nature was powerful enough, for a time, to dominate his entire being. This great stimulus carried him through 1877, and helped to make this year a wonderfully productive period, its fruits becoming visible to the world in the books that appeared during 1878. In January he paid a visit to London, and formed one of his rapid and intimate friendships with Mr Edmund Gosse, to whom he was introduced by Colvin at the Savile Club. "Those who have written about him from later impressions than those of which I speak," says Mr Gosse, "seem to me to give insufficient prominence to the gaiety of Stevenson. It was his cardinal quality in those early days. A child-like mirth leaped and danced in him; he seemed to skip upon the hills of life. He was simply bubbling with quips and jests; his inherent earnestness or passion about abstract things was incessantly relieved by jocosity; and when he had built one of his intellectual castles in the sand, a wave of humour was certain to sweep in and destroy it." He had various whims and oddities, and he upheld the most absurd propositions with such outpourings of fantastic and brilliant argument

as highly delighted his friends. He declaimed, for example, against the amassing of any kind of material property, declaring that such possessions destroyed a man's independence, tethered him to the earth, and prevented him from attaining complete manhood. This idea so attracted him that it seems for a time to have become the foremost tenet of his faith; and when, after a fortnight in London filled full of the stimulating intercourse with congenial minds that to him was the breath of life, he returned to Paris, he put it into practice in his own whimsical fashion. His cousin and kindred spirit appears to have been readily inoculated with the doctrine, and the two left London "with nothing but great-coats and tooth-brushes. It was expensive, to be sure, for every time you had to comb your hair a barber must be paid, and every time you changed your linen one shirt must be bought and another thrown away; but anything was better, argued these young gentlemen, than to be the slaves of haversacks." Thus Stevenson in *The Wrecker*, where the brothers Stennis stand for himself and his cousin. Almost the whole of the Paris part of *The Wrecker* is, in fact, drawn from his own experience. In some moods he loved the great gay city better even than the leafy solitudes of Fontainebleau, to which, however, his true allegiance was given.

A very large part of 1877 was spent in France, where Mrs Osbourne was then living, and in 1878 he was in Scotland only for one fortnight. It was in this year that Mrs Osbourne returned to California,

and Stevenson's gaiety and light-heartedness went suddenly out. He showed a brave face to the world, but in his letters there is a new note of gravity, sometimes of sadness. "There are not many sadder people in the world, perhaps, than I," he wrote to his father. ". . . I am lonely and sick and out of heart. Well, I still hope; I still believe; I still see the good in the inch, and cling to it. It is not much, perhaps, but it is always something. . . . 'Tis a strange world, indeed, but there is a manifest God for those who care to look for Him." This sounds as little like the gay-hearted frequenter of the Savile Club as it sounds like the immature atheist who had vexed his father's soul. Stevenson passed quickly from one phase to another; and the 'wander years,' careless and irresponsible as they seemed, had yet been full of ripening influences that helped to bring him to his brave manhood.

His literary work had, all this time, been going steadily on. He had written many essays and articles for magazines, and in 1878 his first book, *An Inland Voyage*, had been published. During the same year his *New Arabian Nights* and *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh* were appearing serially. Yet with all this he had probably never made as much as £50 in a year by his writing, and was still mainly dependent on his father. He was often in financial difficulties, which were amusing, but inconvenient, but which he met with the same humorous courage with which he was wont to turn uncomfortable situations into interesting adventures. In 1877 his father placed

the sum of £1000 to his credit, but within two years this was all gone, much of it in helping needy friends.

For a time after Mrs Osbourne's departure he went steadily on with his work, and in September started on an eleven days' tour through the Cevennes, in company with the wayward but captivating Modestine, whom he bought at Monastier for sixty-five francs and a glass of brandy. His book, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes,* is one of his triumphs. It belongs to the same class as *An Inland Voyage,* but its style is more natural, its humour sweeter, its sympathy both with nature and humanity truer and deeper. It was published in June 1879, when Stevenson was in London, writing in collaboration with W. E. Henley a play called *Deacon Brodie.* But his work was suddenly interrupted by the news that Mrs Osbourne was seriously ill in California. He was in a fever of uncertainty as to what he ought to do, and though he tried to work, and managed, in fact, to finish the play, the question as to whether he should or should not go out to California occupied all his thoughts. He could not bear to be separated by almost half the world from the woman he loved ; yet to go to her seemed impracticable, and might prove disastrous. He was still largely dependent upon his parents, and even if it should become possible for him to marry Mrs Osbourne he would not be able to provide a home for her. Though he had had no serious illness for some years, his health was still delicate, and there was a possibility that he

might fall ill far from home, and add to Mrs Osbourne's distresses. The few friends to whom he had confided the secret of his attachment strongly advised him not to go. His parents would, he knew, if they were consulted, oppose the project strenuously. But none of these considerations could weigh against the longing he felt to be near Mrs Osbourne again; and so, without a word to his parents, he arranged for his voyage. He determined that, since he was doing something of which he knew his father would disapprove, he would ask for no money from home, but would depend entirely on his own efforts and prove that he was man enough to carry out his enterprise without help. On August 7th, 1879, he sailed from Glasgow in the *Devonia*, bound for New York.

CHAPTER V: *California*

FROM motives of economy Stevenson took his passage in the second cabin, which was "a modified oasis in the very heart of the steerage." The fare provided was, however, rather better than that given to the emigrants proper, and, as Stevenson gravely informs us, passengers of the second cabin ranked in the ship's nomenclature as 'gentlemen and ladies' while the steerage were only 'males and females.' The privilege on which he set most store, however, was that of having a table provided for writing, and at this table, to the immense astonishment of his fellow-passengers, he wrote industriously as often as his health allowed him. Besides keeping a full descriptive diary, upon which he afterward founded his *Amateur Emigrant*, he wrote during the voyage *The Story of a Lie*. He was nicknamed 'The Writer,' and jokes of various kinds went round in derision of what was considered a most unaccountable habit. He bore all this with perfect good humour, and made himself as good a comrade in the second cabin of the *Devonia* as in the high inn chamber of Barbizon. The company was a mixed and certainly not a generally attractive one. It was largely made up of "broken men of England," who, having proved themselves to be possessed of no quality that made for success in their native land, were going out to the new country in the blind and cheerful hope that there some miracle would be performed that would transform

their fortunes. There were husbands fleeing from drunken wives, sons fleeing from drunken fathers, drunkards fleeing from drink. There were the brutal and debased along with the decent and godly; and there were swarms of children, who, as it seemed, were only by a special Providence saved from falling each day by shoals into the water, and whose narrow escapes gave excitement to the monotonous voyage. On the whole they were a cheerful and very human company. They sang glees and choruses and were moved to tears by the songs that recalled the old days in the old country; they played games, they danced solemn dances to tunes played by a fiddler who was one of their number; when they could they smoked and drank; and they grumbled at the food provided quite in the manner of their betters. There is something very charming in Stevenson's account of his fellow-passengers. The real modesty which was one of his essential qualities, and which existed quite naturally side by side with a frank and eager egoism, shows itself in a tone so free from the least sign of superiority or patronage, that it is quite evident he really did not consider himself a better fellow than the broken-down companions whose good-will he tried to gain by small services offered entirely in the spirit of comradeship. His indignation at the arrogance or condescension on the part of officials or saloon passengers is for them, and not for himself. With all of them he was on the friendliest terms, and he soon learnt a

great deal concerning their histories and their prospects.

His chief intimate on board was a Mr Jones, who was "always hovering round inventions like a bee over a flower"; and to this man's stories of his amazing achievements, and the ill-luck that had prevented him from turning these to account, Stevenson listened, not only with patience but with real interest.

On Sunday afternoon, August 18th, the *Devonia* reached New York. With a sudden and characteristic reaction from the cheerful economies of the voyage, Stevenson took his friend Jones to dine at one of the most expensive restaurants in the city; then spent the night in an Irish boarding-house, where he paid the sum of one shilling for his accommodation, and by five o'clock the next day was at the Ferry Depot, waiting to be taken across the river. He carried a small valise, a knapsack, and a railway rug, in which was bestowed Bancroft's *History of the United States* in six fat volumes. There was a dense crowd of people, for four emigrant ships had come in since the previous Saturday night, and all the passengers were anxious to depart by the earliest possible train. Under the stress of such unusual numbers the ordinary arrangements completely broke down. Cold, wet and weary the emigrants stood in close ranks in a long shed, while officials shouted and fumed without making any impression upon the prevailing chaos. At last the crowd began to move, and, straining, pushing and

gasping, passed on to the miserable boat that was to take them across the river. The rain came steadily down, and the heavily-laden, ill-ballasted boat was struck by strong gusts of wind that threatened its destruction. It reached the opposite bank in safety, however, and the emigrants, in whom long-continued misery and discomfort had obliterated all kindly human feeling, made a wild rush for the railway station. The distance was only about a hundred yards, yet Stevenson, exhausted by the struggle in which he had been forced to take part, was obliged twice to stop and sit down on his valise to rest. He was wet through when he reached the platform, and there for another hour he had to sit among the weary, dispirited crowd, too dazed with these accumulated miseries to note the doings of his companions.

At length the cars were unlocked and the emigrants crowded in. Then began that memorable journey of which Stevenson has told us in *Across the Plains.* Weak and utterly out of health as he was, it was a wonder that he survived its manifold discomforts; but his valiant spirit seemed to constrain his feeble body to endure manfully to the end. He fared scantily and coarsely; he shared his bed—made of boards placed from bench to bench of the car, and three straw cushions—with a Pennsylvanian Dutchman; he washed in a tin washing-dish on the platform of the car, where he was all the time in the greatest danger of being jerked from his position by the movement of the train; he consorted with

the squalid, the dirty, and the vulgar; he was treated by officials with the insolent toleration which is all that the emigrant can expect; yet he kept a mind at liberty to observe the strange, beautiful or striking features of the country through which he passed, and to note gratefully the chance kindnesses and courtesies that met him.

San Francisco was reached in the dark hours of the morning of August 30th. "The day was breaking as we crossed the ferry; the fog was rising over the citied hills of San Francisco; the bay was perfect—not a ripple, scarce a stain upon its blue expanse; everything was waiting breathless for the sun. A spot of cloudy gold lit first upon the head of Tamalpais, and then widened downward on its shapely shoulder; the air seemed to awaken, and began to sparkle; and suddenly

> The tall hills Titan discovered,

and the city of San Francisco, and the bay of gold and corn were lit from end to end with summer daylight."[1]

Thus he reached the end of his journey, but with health entirely broken down. His first care was to seek news of Mrs Osbourne. He learnt that she was much better, and had found that it was possible, without giving undue pain to her family, to obtain a divorce from her husband. There was therefore, at last, a prospect of marriage, and he must bestir himself to find the necessary money. The restoration of his own health was of the highest importance,

[1] *Across the Plains.*

and feeling that for the present it was useless for him to try to work, he resolved upon a novel ' cure.' He travelled along the coast a hundred and fifty miles to the south and camped out on a goat ranch on the range of mountains that lies about eighteen miles beyond Monterey. But his strength gave out, and for two nights he lay under a tree in a kind of stupor, and here the two ranchers—old bear-hunters and soldiers—found him. They carried him to their hut and tended him, and he stayed with them for two weeks. As soon as he was well enough he went down to Monterey, the quaint little town which he has celebrated in his essay, "The Old Pacific Capital." This "old township lying among the sands" was "essentially and wholly Mexican," though almost all the land was owned by Americans and Americans held all the public offices. It had had its day of prosperity and had declined; and its former owners partaking of its decay, formed a small society whose stately manners, picturesque customs and brightly-coloured costumes gave to the life of the town a touch of antique grace most healing to those who, like Robert Louis Stevenson, had been rasped by the contemplation of the crude new civilizations of the West. He lodged with a little French doctor, and took one meal a day at a French restaurant, known as Simoneau's. Thus he added one more to his private collection of remembered inns and restaurants, not one of which, he says, can compare with this little inn at Monterey. Day after day he sat down to dinner in the little

chill bare room, whose walls were adorned with rough oil sketches that reminded him of Barbizon. His fellow-guests were of many nationalities—Portuguese, French, Italian, Swiss, German, Chinese and Mexican. With all these Stevenson was soon on friendly terms, though he only sparingly allowed himself time for social intercourse and for rambles in the wood and along the shore. He was working hard and steadily. "The Pavilion on the Links," a story that he had begun some time before, was finished and sent off to the publisher in London. He began a novel called *A Vendetta in the West*, but half-way through this an attack of pleurisy stopped further efforts for the time. In December he returned to San Francisco, searched the city for a cheap lodging, took a room in a poor house in Bush Street, and settled down to work once more. There was no 'Simoneau's' here, and no delightful mixture of the dignified and the gay in the squalid company that he met when the hour for dinner came. For days together he spoke to no one except his landlady and the waiters at the restaurant. Christmas passed in loneliness and with no relaxation of the rigorous way of life he had marked out for himself. He was ill, and suffering acutely, yet he never dreamt of giving in and appealing to his parents for help. He would battle this out by himself, and prove himself to be a man, or he would die in the attempt. Remittances from editors in England came in but slowly. Some important letters, including one from his father enclosing twenty pounds, were delayed

or miscarried. Yet he contrived to write cheerfully to his friends, and in the serio-comic account of his life that he sent to Colvin he did his best to hide what nevertheless appears between the lines, his real suffering under those sordid conditions. Each morning, he wrote, a gentleman might be seen descending the steps of 608 Bush Street, and might be observed making his way to a neighbouring cheap restaurant, there to take his breakfast of coffee, roll and butter—cost, fivepence. The gentleman, he added, had had some difficulty at first in bringing his roll to an end concurrently with his butter, but practice, and the impossibility of affording a second pat of the latter article, had made him expert, and now roll and butter expired at the same moment. Half an hour later the same gentleman might be seen, "armed like George Washington with his little hatchet," splitting kindling wood and breaking coal on the window-sill—choosing, so it was explained, this prominent position, not through a desire to exhibit his strength, his skill, or his industry, but simply because there was no other place in the room where such exercise could be taken without danger of serious damage to the structure. Then for three or four hours the doughty performer is "engaged darkly with the ink-bottle." At midday he sallies forth again to dine, enjoys a "copious meal" with half a bottle of wine, and coffee and brandy, for the sum of two and twopence. Then, until 4.30, "the being walks"; an hour's devotion to correspondence, or "the mysterious rites of the forenoon," follows,

then another meal of coffee and roll and butter, an evening spent in reading and writing, until bedtime comes at eleven o'clock.

From the loneliness of his dingy room in a mean street of a crowded city how far away must have appeared the happy comradeship of Fontainebleau, the brilliant, stimulating intercourse of the Savile Club, and even the companionable solitude of Swanston Cottage, "looking to the hills." It is true that even under these unfavourable conditions his genius for making friends did not entirely forsake him. Three chance acquaintances who became real friends he made in San Francisco—the artist, Virgil Williams, and his wife, and Charles Warren Stoddard. These gladly welcomed him to their homes whenever he could be induced to come; but his plan of life was so severe, and his industry so unremitting, that he would not allow himself more than an occasional visit. Mr Stoddard rendered him an important service in another way. He lent him Herman Melville's books, *Typee*, *Omoo* and *South Sea Idylls*, and these stories of strange and delightful lands opened out new realms to Stevenson and turned his thoughts toward those islands of the Pacific, one of which was, later, to be his home.

Mrs Osbourne was now free, but no definite arrangement as to the date of her marriage with Stevenson had so far been made. As yet there were no signs of a reconciliation between him and his father, and things were going very badly with the self-exiled man. A letter to Charles Baxter,

written toward the end of January 1880, announces that the writer has had to drop from a fifty cent to a twenty-five cent dinner, so that his daily food now costs him the sum of one shilling and tenpence halfpenny. Yet in February he wrote to W. E. Henley that he was "well, cheerful and happy." He was working desperately to gain the money which meant to him independence and the vindication of his right as a man to choose his own path. The manuscripts that he sent home were accepted by the editors who received them, but the money came in slowly and Stevenson could not afford to wait. The long period of privation was rapidly breaking down his health. If he could only hang out a little longer, however, there was a prospect of some works more considerable than magazine articles being finished and of really substantial sums coming in. But in March his landlady's little daughter fell dangerously ill, and Stevenson, forgetting his own cares, devoted himself to nursing the child. This brought his long struggle to an end. For six weeks he lay so ill that it was, as he says, a 'toss-up' whether he would recover. But he won the toss, with the help of a kind and skilful doctor, and of his future wife, who nursed him with entire devotion. Gradually the rapid consumption that threatened him retreated, and left him with only his normal amount of lung weakness, but worn out and attenuated so that it seemed scarcely possible that he could struggle back to health. Meanwhile, his father had heard of the straits to which he had

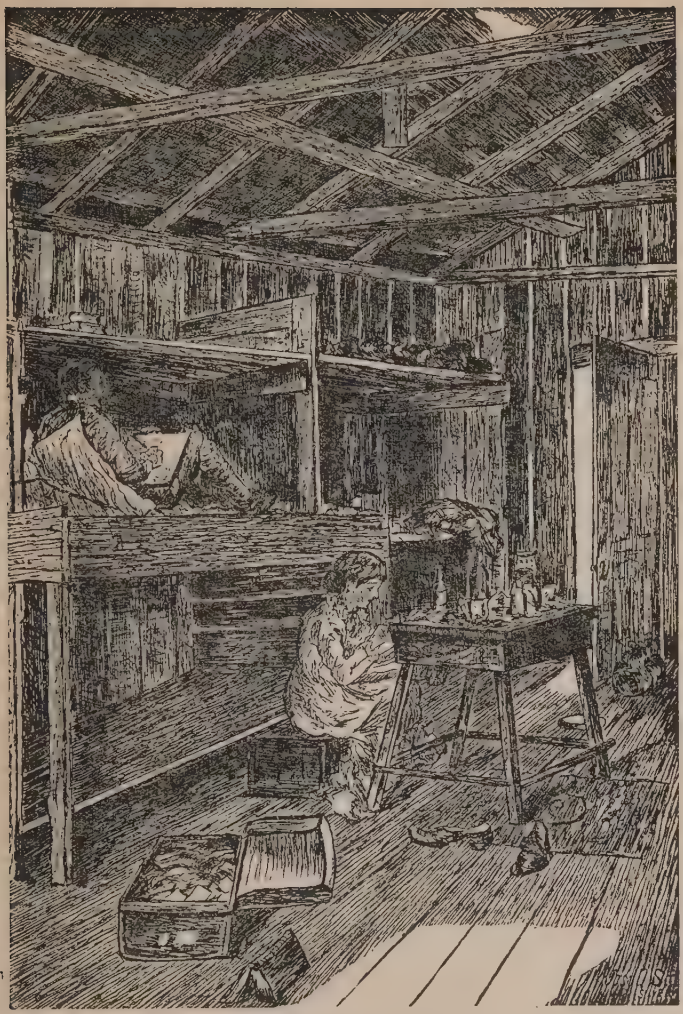
been reduced, and of his terrible illness, and had at once telegraphed that he might in future count on an income of £250 annually. This was a tremendous relief and helped on Louis' convalescence wonderfully.

On May 19th, 1880, while he was yet, as he afterward said, "a mere complication of cough and bones," he was married to Mrs Osbourne. He had achieved the Great Adventure, through such trials and dangers, exile and peril of death, as surely entitled him to share the reward of the heroes of the old stories, and 'live happy ever after.' In a sense he did live happy ever after, for his wife brought him such happiness as he had never known before. But the tame and peaceful life which is implied in the dear, conventional fairy tale ending was not for him. His thirst for adventure was unquenched; and the best proof that the wife he had chosen was his true and fitting helpmate is to be found in her willingness to go with him on those quests which led far away from the smooth highroad of everyday life.

Immediately after the marriage she prepared to start with him upon a honeymoon as unconventional, surely, as any bride has ever been asked to contemplate. Stevenson has told the story of their adventures in his book *The Silverado Squatters*, and to home-abiding English people the whole reads like pure romance. The two, with Mrs Stevenson's young son, Lloyd Osbourne, crossed the Bay of San Francisco to South Vallejo, where they stayed

for a few days looking for some retired and healthful spot where they might live a perfectly quiet and simple life. Beyond Vallejo stretched bald, green pasture lands, rising to wooded hills, which were the outposts of one section of the Californian Coast Range. Between the hills green and well-watered valleys extended down to the sea, and it was along one of these—the Napa Valley—that the Stevensons pursued their investigations. One end of it was blocked by Mount Helena, the Mont Blanc of the range, and about three miles from this stood the newly-built village of Calistoga, with its one street of bright, clean, low houses. The whole neighbourhood of St Helena had once been alive with mining camps and villages, but now most of these were deserted; the houses stood dismantled and empty, the owners having departed and left them to their fate. It seemed to Stevenson that one of these houses offered just what he and his wife were looking for, and by the advice of Kelma, the Calistoga store-keeper and great man of the village, he decided to explore the Silverado settlement. It lay in a sheltered and beautiful position on the slope of Mount Helena; "there in the nick just where the eastern foothills joined the mountain, and she herself began to rise above the zone of forest—there was Silverado." To reach it he and his wife travelled two miles up the valley beyond Calistoga, then struck off to the right. The road mounted steeply; vineyards and deep meadows gave place to woods, where grew sturdy oaks and enormous pines. Near

the shoulder of St Helena they left the road, took a trail to the left, and came soon to an open grassy space, planted sparsely like an orchard, with forest instead of fruit trees. But to their disappointment all the houses that had made up the Silverado settlement had been carted away, except one, which had formerly been the hotel, and was now occupied by a hunter whose name was Rufe Hanson. Mrs Hanson, however, when questioned, remembered that there were some houses remaining "at the tunnel," so the seekers pursued their way about a furlong along a road running through a forest and round the side of the hill, to a place where it suddenly widened and ended abruptly in a great canyon. The canyon was walled across by a 'dump' of rolling stones, from twenty to thirty feet high. Up this they mounted by ladders, then walked over a mass of loose stones, until they struck a triangular platform filling up the whole glen. Walls of bare red rock rose shutting it in on three sides. A line of rails, with trucks and other miners' stock, in front, and two shafts that had been sunk farther back showed that this had been the scene of the Silverado mining operations. But the object upon which the eyes of Stevenson and his wife fastened with the greatest eagerness was a small, brown, wooden house built upon one side of the platform, close up to the red wall of rock. It contained three rooms, each of which was entered from a different side and a different level. The window-frames had all been taken away, and sand



R. L. S. AT SILVERADO

From *The Silverado Squatters*
By permission of Messrs Chatto & Windus

had drifted in, blocking up the entrance; and in this soil chance seeds had produced a flourishing crop of vegetation. The upper room, which, while the mine was working, had provided sleeping accommodation for thirty miners, was fitted with a triple tier of beds, arranged like the berths in a ship.

The Stevensons lost no time in making up their minds. This, they decided, should be their home for the summer. With some help from Rufe Hanson and his family the house was cleared and made habitable; some furniture and a stove were brought up from Calistoga, and the "Silverado Squatters" began their experiment. Stevenson and his wife shared the household duties between them. Each morning he rose early from his shelf-like bed and filled the kettle at a pool of clear water that lay behind one of the shafts; then lit a fire in the stove and prepared breakfast. After breakfast it was Mrs Stevenson's turn; and her husband went out into the sunlight to smoke his pipe, and gaze down into the beautiful little wooded dell below, with its fragrant trees of bay and nutmeg; and the little stream which, its head waters having been tapped by the shaft, had wandered long underground, but which farther on "came trotting out into the sunlight with a song." Sometimes for many days they saw no one but Mrs Hanson's brother, who came to split the huge logs that lay round about, to make fuel for their stove. Occasionally they walked down the hillside to visit the Toll House, the inn that lay in a glen below Silverado, and were present

at the daily scene of excitement when the two Lakeport coaches, the one coming and the other going, woke up the drowsy little settlement for a brief space into shouting, bustling life. But, says Stevenson, "it appears to me looking back as though the far greater part of our life at Silverado had been passed propped upon an elbow or seated on a plank, listening to the silence that there is among the hills." [1]

The summer, however, did not pass without disaster. Mrs Stevenson and her son both caught diphtheria. An illness in the miners' house at Silverado was a terrible experience, and although happily both patients recovered, it was felt that the charm of the place had departed. About the middle of July the party left Silverado, and made their way to New York, homeward bound for England.

Nothing now remained of the late misunderstanding between Stevenson and his father. A deep and peculiarly beautiful affection existed between these two who had each done so much to wound and sadden the other. From this time forward their relations took on a tenderness unusual between grown men, and especially touching in view of the stern and rugged character of the elder Stevenson. For his son's sake he was now willing and anxious to receive the wife of whom he had heard little that was agreeable to his strict Scottish notions, and the way for the return of the exile was made as smooth as his affectionate words

[1] *The Silverado Squatters.*

and freely given money could make it. On August 7th, 1880, just a year since Stevenson had left Scotland, the party sailed from New York. They were met at Liverpool by Thomas Stevenson, his wife, and Colvin, and the party travelled on together to Edinburgh. It did not take the younger Mrs Stevenson long to establish her position with her new relatives. Her husband's father in particular was strongly attracted to her, and soon learned to regard the marriage as the best thing that could possibly have happened to Louis. The only trouble that remained was the state of his health. He had by no means recovered from the effects of his late privations and serious illness, and must, at any rate for a time, be regarded as an invalid.

CHAPTER VI: *In Search of Health*

EDINBURGH, as Stevenson admits, "pays cruelly for her high seat in one of the vilest climates under heaven. She is liable to be beaten upon by all the winds that blow, to be drenched with rain, to be buried in cold sea fogs out of the east, and powdered with the snow as it comes flying southward from the Highland hills." [1]

Only sound lungs can endure in a climate such as this; and a very few weeks proved that, for Stevenson, a winter in Edinburgh would be disastrous. Doctors were consulted, who spoke seriously of his condition, and strongly advised him to try what the air of the High Alps would do for him. Accordingly, about the middle of October Mr and Mrs Stevenson, with Lloyd Osbourne, set out for Davos Platz. There was a fourth member of the party also, who, as he became Stevenson's almost constant companion during the next three years, must now be introduced. This was "a little, very alert, well-bred, intelligent Skye terrier, as black as a hat, with a wet bramble for a nose and two cairngorms for eyes." He was a gift from Sir Walter Simpson, and had at first been called 'Walter,' in honour of the donor, but his name had been subjected to a series of corruptions, and it was as 'Woggs' that he travelled to Davos Platz.

The party arrived on November 4th and established

[1] *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh.*

themselves at the Hotel Belvedere. Davos, as a health resort, was at that time only in the first stages of its development, and there were comparatively few visitors. Yet Stevenson did not find in this Swiss valley the sense of freedom and solitude that was essential to him. He complained that the valley was so shut in by mountains that no glimpse of open country was possible, and the dwellers were forced "to live in holes and corners" and could "change only one for another." On the confined, monotonous walks that alone were possible you saw houses all the way, dotted to right and to left. You could not get away into happy solitude; there was always "some one in front whom you were visibly overtaking," or "some one behind who was audibly overtaking you"; while a score or so passed going in the opposite direction. But the life had its good points. There were beautiful, still dawns, when the clouds lay low and grey over a world so thickly covered with its carpet of snow that no sound was heard, and men passed, and heavy waggons rolled along, like dream figures before the eyes of sleep. There were solemn starlight nights and clear bright noons; and there were breathless moments when, having with pains dragged one's toboggan up the long slope, one sped like the wind down those strange, white mountains into the vale where the lights glittered below—moments such as teach "the pulse an unaccustomed tune" and add "a new excitement to the life of man upon his planet."

For society, the members of the little party were mainly and happily dependent on each other. Stevenson delighted to join in the occupations of his young stepson, and Woggs, the pugnacious, might confidently be depended upon to provide some small excitement daily. One very congenial friend they had found waiting for them when they reached Davos—John Addington Symonds, who, like Stevenson, had come to seek for health in the High Alps, and to whom Mr Edmund Gosse had given them a letter of introduction. The delight of finding some one with whom he could hold the long intimate discussions that he loved gave Davos, for Stevenson, something of the charm of Barbizon.

The winter passed without an attack of illness, but no considerable improvement took place in the general state of Stevenson's health. The doctors were confident, however, that the climate of Davos would ultimately have favourable effects, and it was with the prospect of returning in the following winter that, at the end of April, he and his wife left the Alpine valley. Lloyd Osbourne had, before this, been sent to school in England, so they had only Woggs for their companion upon the homeward journey. They made a short stay at Barbizon and another at Paris, and at the end of May reached Edinburgh.

June and July were spent with Mrs Thomas Stevenson at Pitlochry, in a small house near a "wonderful burn." Here work was seriously taken up again. Travel and general articles were for a

time put aside, and a volume of tales dealing with the supernatural was projected. Three of these tales, "Thrawn Janet," "The Merry Men," and "The Body Snatcher," were written during the stay at Pitlochry. At the beginning of August the party—now increased by the presence of Lloyd Osbourne, home for the holidays—moved to Braemar, where they lived in a cottage "late the late Miss M'Gregor's." At Braemar Stevenson began *Treasure Island*; and his own delightful account of the manner of its inception must be given. "There was a schoolboy in the late Miss M'Gregor's cottage, home from the holidays. . . . He had no thought of literature; it was the art of Raphael that received his fleeting suffrages; and with the aid of pen and ink, and a shilling box of water-colours, he had soon turned one of the rooms into a picture gallery. My more immediate duty towards the gallery was to be showman; but I would sometimes unbend a little, join the artist (so to speak) at the easel, and pass the afternoon with him in a generous emulation, making coloured drawings. On one of these occasions I made the map of an island; it was elaborately, and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance 'Treasure Island.' . . . No child but must remember laying his head in the grass, staring into the infinitesimal forest, and seeing it grow populous with fairy armies. Some-

what in this way, as I paused upon my map of Treasure Island, the future characters of the book began to appear there visibly among imaginary woods, and their brown faces and bright weapons peeped out upon me, from unexpected quarters, as they passed to and fro, fighting and hunting treasure on those few square inches of a flat projection. The next thing I knew I had some papers before me, and was writing out a list of chapters. . . . On a chill September morning, by the cheek of a brisk fire and the rain drumming on the window, I began *The Sea Cook,* for that was the original title. I have begun (and finished) a number of other books, but I cannot remember to have sat down to one of them with more complacency." [1]

The whole party took a delighted interest in the new story, and were eager to have a hand in its making. There were to be no women characters: "Lloyd's orders," said Stevenson, "and who so blithe to obey." Mr Thomas Stevenson, who had joined them for a week or two, was as keen as the schoolboy in urging the writer on and supplying details and suggestions. The list of the contents of Billy Bones' chest was his; he spent a whole morning making it out on the back of a legal envelope; and it was at his especial request that the treasure-seeking ship was called the *Walrus.* Dr Alexander Hay Japp, a new acquaintance then visiting at the cottage, was almost equally interested, and lamented that he was obliged to leave while

[1] *The Art of Writing.*

the story was still in its early stages. His place was taken by Mr Edmund Gosse, who caught fire at once when the pages already written were read to him; and under the stimulus of such general excitement and appreciation the story went merrily on at the rate of a chapter a day.

Before September was ended, and when the nineteenth chapter had been reached, there came a change in the weather. Cold winds and rain obliged Stevenson to leave hurriedly for the South. He visited London, had an interview with Dr Clark, and October 18th saw him and his wife again established at Davos. *Treasure Island* had, in the meantime, been accepted, on the recommendation of Dr Japp, by the proprietor of *Young Folks*, and had begun its course as a serial. It was necessary, therefore, to finish the story as soon as possible. Stevenson's health had so far improved since the previous winter that he was able to sit down regularly to a steady spell of work. In order that he might not be subjected to the interruptions of hotel life, a chalet was taken, a servant hired, and the little household arranged in every way to suit his convenience. In these very different surroundings the work that had been so suddenly dropped at Braemar was resumed. Happily the inspiration held. Fourteen more chapters were written in a fortnight, and the book was finished with the same spirit and ease that had attended its beginning. After a short spell of idleness, Stevenson started on *The Silverado Squatters*, and before he left Davos in April he had

finished this, as well as written five articles for various magazines. Still he was not altogether satisfied with what he had accomplished. His ambition of keeping his family without help from his father was still far from being attained. *Treasure Island* had attracted but little notice, and there was, so far, no suggestion that it should be revived in book form. His papers in the *Cornhill* had proved very popular, but had not been generally recognized as anything above the ordinary run of magazine articles. He was disappointed, though not discouraged; and the inspiration that had carried him on so happily began to flag. The summer was spent mainly in the Highlands, where the family was joined by Colvin, and where *The Treasure of Franchard* was begun. But the weather was wet and dreary, and again in September Stevenson was forced to make a hurried flight southward, this time not before a hæmorrhage had put the whole party in a state of alarm. He went to London, saw Dr Clark, and was delighted to receive from him a confirmation of the opinion given by the doctor at Davos in the previous April that a return to the High Alps for the coming winter was not a necessity. The climate of Davos had never agreed with Mrs Stevenson, and as her health, too, had now broken down, the permission to pass the winter months in France was especially welcome. About the middle of September Louis, with his favourite cousin, 'Bob,' set out for France, in search of a suitable resting-place. They passed through Paris, tried Montpellier

without result, and his companion being then obliged to return, Louis went on alone to Marseilles. Here his wife joined him, and together they decided upon a lovely country house at St Marcel, about five miles from Marseilles. But the choice was most unfortunate. For some reason that did not appear the house had a most disastrous effect on Stevenson's health, and from October to Christmas he had constant attacks of illness and was only capable of very short and intermittent spells of work. Then, as a crowning disaster, a fever broke out in St Marcel. Mrs Stevenson in her letters described most vividly the distressing incidents of this epidemic. Her one endeavour was to shield her husband, and it was hastily arranged that he should proceed to Nice, leaving her to wind up their affairs at St Marcel and follow him later. There ensued a series of mischances that resulted in nearly a week of distressing suspense for Mrs Stevenson. The letters and telegrams sent to her from Nice all miscarried. She waited in a fever of anxiety for four days, then went to Marseilles and telegraphed to every place she could think of whence news might possibly be obtained. "The people at Marseilles were very kind," she wrote to Mr Symonds, "and advised me to take no further steps to find my husband. He was certainly dead, they said. It was plain that he stopped at some little station on the road, speechless and dying, and it was now too late to do anything; I had much better return at once to my friends. 'Eet ofen appens so,' said the Secretary,

and 'Oh yes, all right, very well,' added a Swiss in a sympathetic voice." [1] Two days more passed, and then Mrs Stevenson took the train to Nice, making inquiries at every station on her way. She found her husband safe and well, and reading the first letter of the many she had written to him as she knocked at the door.

From Nice they went on to Marseilles, and then to Hyères, and here at last they found the ideal home of which they had been in search. "This spot, our garden and our view are sub-celestial," Stevenson wrote to his friends at home. "I sing daily with Bunyan, that great bard, 'I dwell already the next door to Heaven.'" [2]

During the nine months that he spent at his 'Chalet La Solitude,' as the house was named, his health steadily improved, and his literary prospects brightened. At the beginning of May he wrote in the highest spirits to his father and mother to tell them that he had received from Messrs Cassell an offer for the book rights of *Treasure Island*, for ". . . A hundred pounds, all alive, O! A hundred jingling, tingling, golden-minted quid. . . . It does look as if I should support myself without trouble in the future. If I have only health, I can, I thank God. It is dreadful to be a great big man, and not be able to buy bread."

The thought that his great ambition was in a fair way to be realized spurred him on to fresh exertions. *The Silverado Squatters* was finished and sent off to

[1] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.* [2] *Ibid.*

a publisher in America. A collection of poems for children that had been begun at Braemar was added to until the book was nearly complete. Then *Prince Otto*, begun in the sad San Francisco days, was taken in hand. Ten days later Stevenson was, as he said, "up to the waist in it," and it was only by valiant and steady efforts that he finally drew himself triumphantly free. In all his undertakings his wife was his constant helper and sympathizer. "I love her better than ever, and admire her more," he wrote to his mother in one of his rare expansive moments, "and I cannot think what I have done to deserve so good a gift." His young stepson was also a source of great delight to him. The boy in Stevenson never died, though in the ordinary business of life he made way for the more seriously disposed man; but he was never far away, and in moments of relaxation he stepped naturally to the front place, with the entire and unblushing approval of the elder partner. For all his youth and his wildness, this 'eternal boy' sometimes did good service; it was he who gave Stevenson his first popular success, for it was he who wrote *Treasure Island*. The book appeared in November 1883, and the stories of statesmen and critics who sat up till the small hours of the morning to read it recall the triumphant days of the Waverley Novels. Scott himself never wrote anything more full of the robust spirit of adventure than this book, the work of a consumptive patient who could not brave a shower, and must flee for his life before a fog.

Portrait of Stevenson at Vailima 98

Photo J. Patrick

One great sorrow clouded the latter part of this year. In September came the news of the death of Walter Ferrier, one of Stevenson's oldest friends. The strange and sad career of this brilliant, gifted young Scotsman is sketched in the essay "Old Mortality," and this, with the letter to W. E. Henley, written soon after the news came, shows how deep was Stevenson's grief at this first breach in the inner circle of his friends.

He looked eagerly for comfort to the promised visit of W. E. Henley and Charles Baxter. They came in January; but after a week spent at 'La Solitude' it was found that this earthly paradise was too small to accommodate the whole party in comfort. Stevenson therefore proposed that they should all go and take a holiday together in some other place. They went to Nice, and there he caught a cold which brought on congestion of the lungs. The doctors agreed that there was no hope, and advised Mrs Stevenson to send for some member of the family to be with her at the end. She sent for Bob Stevenson, and he encouraged her, even in these desperate circumstances, to hope. Together they nursed Louis, and once more the stubborn Scottish constitution triumphed. Inch by inch the enemy was driven back, though it could not be entirely conquered. Time after time during the next few months a similar battle had to be fought, and once at least defeat was very near. In the first week in May, after the Stevensons had returned to 'La Solitude,' came a most terrible attack of hæmorrhage.

Being unable to speak, Stevenson made signs to his wife for a paper and pencil, and wrote: "Don't be frightened; if this is death, it is an easy one." Mrs Stevenson's hand shook as she tried to pour out for her husband the medicine that he required; he took the bottle from her, and with a steady hand measured out the dose.

Through the anxious days that followed, his one thought was for his wife, as hers was for him. He bore the accumulation of ills that fell upon him with a cheery patience that helped her, frail as she was, to bear up under the heavy toil of nursing and attendance; and she lightened, by every device that love-directed ingenuity could suggest, the tedium of the sick-room. The patient was forbidden to speak for fear of bringing a return of the hæmorrhage, and for the same reason his right arm was worn in a sling; he suffered acutest pain from sciatica; and, finally, an attack of Egyptian ophthalmia condemned him to the almost complete inaction of a darkened room. His wife sat by him, and invented for his amusement some of the marvellous and laughably-serious stories that appeared later in *The Dynamiter*. He wrote her cheerful little notes, treating, after his fashion, the effort of forming letters with his left hand in the gloom of his darkened room as a delightful new adventure; and he actually wrote, in the same way, some more verses for his projected *Child's Garden*. In the face of such a cheerful ignoring of his claims to make his victim miserable and helpless, it is small wonder that the

enemy at last retreated in disgust; and before the end of May Louis was pronounced convalescent. "The doctor says," wrote Mrs Stevenson to the anxious parents in Edinburgh, "'Keep him alive until he is forty, and then—although a winged bird, he may live to ninety.' But between now and forty he must live as though he were walking on eggs, and for the next two years, no matter how he feels, he must live the life of an invalid." [1]

At the beginning of June the party left Hyères, and after a short stay at Royat, travelled by easy stages to England, where they arrived on July 1st, 1884. It was now nearly four years since Stevenson's return from California, and the whole of that time had been spent in a diligent search after health. Yet in 1884 his condition was little better than it had been in 1880, and the prospect was darker in so far as all hope of a moderately speedy recovery had been given up. For some years at least he was condemned to live the life of an invalid, and the question now arose as to where those years should be passed. Stevenson's strongest wish in the matter was that he might be near his father, who was now perceptibly failing. One by one the various activities connected with the business in which Thomas Stevenson had delighted were given up, and as his outside interests thus fell away, he drew closer to the members of his small home circle, and especially to his well-loved son. The caressing tenderness of his manner toward Louis touched

[1] Graham Balfour's *Life*.

deeply all those who saw the two together. "It was," says Mrs Stevenson, "just like a mother with a young child." That these two, who loved each other so dearly, and whose lives both hung by such a slender thread, might not be entirely cut off from opportunities of meeting, seemed a thing for which some risks might well be run; and since two doctors out of four who were consulted were of the opinion that Stevenson might live at Bournemouth with tolerable safety, at Bournemouth he decided to remain. Both he and his wife were delighted at the prospect that this plan opened up. Compared with the life they had been forced to live since their marriage, a home within a few hours' journey of London, and with Edinburgh and Paris at by no means impossible distances, seemed to them a very modified and bearable form of exile.

The first winter was spent partly at an hotel, and partly in private lodgings; and though Stevenson was rarely able to leave the house, he had no serious attack of illness, and managed to do a very fair amount of work. Mr Henley spent two months at Bournemouth, and the two, whose *Deacon Brodie* had been produced that summer and had met with some success, worked together at two more plays, *Beau Austin* and *Admiral Guinea,* which they hoped would bring them the rich reward that falls to the successful playwright. Stevenson also, in response to a request from the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* for a Christmas story, furbished up the weird and horrible tale "The Body Snatcher," written two years before at Pitlochry.

Such a record was cheering in the highest degree to those who were watching with anxious tremors the effect of this experiment of a winter in England. It seemed to justify the provision of a permanent home in Bournemouth for Stevenson and his wife; and at the end of January 1885 Thomas Stevenson bought a comfortable, modern, ivy-covered house, with about an acre of ground, and presented it to his daughter-in-law. It was named 'Skerryvore,' in memory of one of the family's greatest achievements in lighthouse building. A tiny stream ran at the bottom of the garden, a bank of heather bordered the lawn, and there were glorious clumps of rhododendrons growing in a small chine above the stream. At 'Skerryvore' Stevenson and his wife lived for the greater part of the next four years. In the summer and autumn he usually managed to pay some visits to London; once he went with his father to Matlock, and with his wife he visited Cambridge, Dartmoor, and Paris. But these journeys nearly always brought an attack of illness which meant weeks of confinement to a sick-room. In winter he scarcely went out at all. "Remember the pallid brute who lived in 'Skerryvore' like a weevil in a biscuit," he wrote years later from Vailima to his friend Colvin; but there is little justification for the comparison unless one can imagine it to be characteristic of a weevil to live a life intense as secluded, and to force his narrow surroundings to yield to him that which sufficed to fill his days with variety and interest. Stevenson made new friends, though his

opportunities for social intercourse were few, since he was forced to spend weeks together in bed, and forbidden to speak above a whisper. Moreover, if he was in his normal state of health, no visitor—it mattered not from what distance—who was suffering from a cold could be admitted to 'Skerryvore,' for fear of infection. So that it is a proof of that genius for friendship which has already been spoken of that he became really intimate, not only with Dr Scot, who attended him, but also with his neighbours, Sir Henry and Lady Taylor and their daughter, Sir Percy and Lady Shelley, and Miss Boodle. He could no longer roam about the streets as he had been used to do "scraping acquaintance with all classes of man- and woman-kind," but this only meant that he got the more out of those few possible acquaintances of a class different from his own who came in his way—servants, tradespeople, the barber who came to cut his hair, and the veterinary surgeon who attended the death-bed of poor Woggs—who had by this time undergone a further transformation and become 'Boguey.' Boguey died from wounds received in battle, and his master and mistress mourned him so deeply that they never could bring themselves to put another dog in his vacant place.

But work was Stevenson's greatest resource and greatest pleasure. He completed his *Child's Garden of Verses*, and this was published in March 1885. In April the first instalment of *Prince Otto* was published, and in May appeared *More New Arabian Nights*. In the later part of the same year there

came to him the curious experience that led to the production of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.* He had, he tells us, been seeking for a long time " to find a body, a vehicle, for that strong sense of man's double being which must at times come in upon and overwhelm the mind of every thinking creature." He had tried various forms—*The Travelling Companion,* which was rejected by the editor to whom it was sent, and which he afterward burnt, and *Markheim,* a psychological study which was published later. But neither of these gave a satisfactory shape to the idea that was in his mind, and he still went seeking some fresh inspiration. At length, when for two days his thoughts had been given almost exclusively to this subject, help came to him in his sleep. He has told us how from his earliest years he was a persistent dreamer. In his childhood his dreams were the ordinary vague and terrifying experiences that come to nervous and sensitive natures ; but as he grew older, the confused sights and sounds resolved themselves into definite scenes and more or less connected stories ; and the stories grew clearer and clearer, until at last enough remained of them in the dreamer's mind when he woke in the morning to enable him to sit down at his desk and write out what the Little People, or Brownies, as he called them, had told him in the night. It was to the Brownies that he owed the inspiration of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.* He saw in his sleep, he tells us, two of the most important scenes in his story, and when he woke, although he

was still very weak from a recent attack of hæmorrhage, he sat down and wrote, from the suggestion thus given, the story of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. When it was finished it was submitted to his wife, who was his constant and most trusted critic. She found in it one fundamental fault—it was really an allegory, but was treated as if it were merely a story. Stevenson was, at this time, forbidden to speak, so, according to the custom established for such circumstances, the criticism was written out and left for him to read. After a short interval his bell rang. His wife went to him and found him sitting up in bed and pointing to a heap of ashes, which was all that remained of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. He had seen the justice of the criticism, had realized that the new attempt must have in it nothing of the old, and had taken the best means to ensure this result. He set to work again, and wrote with almost feverish energy during three days; and instead of being exhausted by this tremendous effort, he seemed to feel the excitement as a tonic. The next month or six weeks was spent in polishing the story, and it was issued—in paper covers at the price of one shilling—by Messrs Longmans. At first it threatened to fall flat; then a review in the *Times* drew public attention to it, and it suddenly became the rage. In the next six months forty thousand copies were sold in England; and the American edition was almost equally successful.

Another story furnished by the Brownies was "Olalla," which appeared in the Christmas number

of the *Court and Society Review*. This, however, was not so successful, and Stevenson himself criticized it severely. In the previous March he had began a story for boys, laying the scene in the district he knew so well—the country near Edinburgh, where the manse of Colinton stood. The story had been taken up without any very serious intent, and as lightly discarded after a few chapters had been written. But, in January 1886, after *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* had been fairly launched, Stevenson's thoughts went back to this fragment. The story was resumed, and flowed with such surprising ease that it almost seemed to write itself. "In one of my books, and in one only," says Stevenson, "the characters took the bit in their teeth; all at once they became detached from the flat paper, they turned their backs on me and walked off bodily; and from that time my task was stenographic—it was they who spoke, it was they who wrote the remainder of the story."[1] This was at the beginning; but before the rough outline of the story as it existed in Stevenson's mind was more than half filled in the inspiration flagged, and when Mr Colvin suggested that the return of the hero to Edinburgh would give an opportunity of bringing the story to a close he gladly agreed. In this unfinished condition, the story, which he called *Kidnapped*, was accepted by the editor of *Young Folks*, and ran in that magazine from May to July.

But there were many hours and days during this

[1] *The Art of Writing.*

period of his life when, by the doctor's orders, or by sheer physical inability which even his resolution could not overcome, no work could be attempted. Yet even each of these was forced to yield something as it passed. Music was a great resource. His old taste for it revived, and when he was well enough to be up he would sit for hours at the piano trying to pick out the melodies that ran so joyously in his head. He never learned to play even passably well, and his efforts at composition were still less successful; but he was not one of those men who can find enjoyment only where they excel. His pleasure came from the effort, from the sense of the stirring of new faculties, bodily or mental. When he was too ill even for music, and was forced to lie silent in his bed, he amused himself by modelling small figures of wax or clay, and to this employment also he brought the keenest possible zest.

Stevenson took, moreover, a keen interest in public affairs, though, after the incident of the withdrawal of troops from the Soudan in 1884 he had, as he says, "died to politics." If an opportunity came for him to do anything, he would, he said, do it; until that hour came he would not vex his soul. Twice while he was living at Bournemouth he believed that the hour had come. The first occasion was upon the fall of Khartoum and the death of Gordon, when he contemplated an attempt to call Mr Gladstone to account and to stir the national conscience by public denunciation of those who had left so many brave soldiers to a cruel death.

But he hesitated and the time passed, and though it is unlikely that anything he could have done would have proved effective, he always bitterly regretted his inaction. The second occasion arose out of the affairs of Ireland. Toward the end of 1885 a farmer of Kerry was shot by a party of moonlighters, and his family, who had fought bravely in defence of their father and had killed one of his murderers, were afterward subjected to a cruel and rigorous boycott. Stevenson read the details of the case with horrified indignation. It seemed to him terrible that the people of England should sit still and make no sign while brave and innocent men and women all over the sister country were at the mercy of those who could so deal with their fellow-creatures. When the boycott had gone on until the spring of 1887 he decided that he himself as an honest man and one who hated oppression was called upon to do something to help those who were suffering. He formed in all seriousness a plan which seemed to his friends, and even to his wife, quixotic and absurd, but which he regarded simply as the fulfilment of a plain duty. He proposed to take the condemned farm, and go with his wife and stepson to live there. His friends pointed out that this would do no good to those he wished to benefit—might possibly do them harm; but he was not to be turned from his purpose. To him the question was not one of expediency or even of benevolence. Should judgment go by default for Might against Right? Should not the brave,

eternal principle of clean justice between man and man be upheld in spite of politics ?—it was thus that the case presented itself to him. Mrs Stevenson, respecting, though not sympathizing with, her husband's convictions, was ready to go with him and to do her part cheerfully ; and it was only his father's rapidly increasing illness that caused the plan to be abandoned. " To the last," says Sir Sidney Colvin, " he was never well satisfied that he had done right in giving way."

On May 8th, 1887, Thomas Stevenson died. Since the previous autumn he had been living at Bournemouth in order to be near his son, but during April he grew so ill that it was thought advisable to take him to his home in Edinburgh. The change brought no improvement, and Louis was hurriedly sent for, but arrived too late to be recognized by his father.

The loss was to him a terrible one, and in his weak physical state he found it hard to fight against the depression that settled heavily upon him. The bleak winds of an Edinburgh spring brought him a fresh cold, and on the day of his father's funeral he was too ill to leave the house. For nearly three weeks this illness kept him in Edinburgh, and when he at length returned to Bournemouth, it was only to be attacked by another hæmorrhage, followed by a tedious convalescence. Before he left his sick-room he had made arrangements for bringing his stay at Bournemouth to a close. The three years' continual battle against ill-health had worn him out, bravely as he had faced the enemy. His doctors strongly

advised a change, and there was nothing now to keep him in England, since his mother was willing to go with him wherever he elected to settle. He determined, therefore, to see if, the world lying before him, he could not find some place where he might live the ordinary life of a normal man, and be done with invalidism. After consideration it was resolved that America, as being Mrs Stevenson's home, and already in part familiar to them, should first be tried. By the middle of July 'Skerryvore' was let, and passages taken for Stevenson, his wife, mother, stepson, and their attached and capable maid, Valentine Roch, for New York.

CHAPTER VII: *America and the South Seas*

ON August 20th, 1887, Stevenson left Bournemouth for London, spent a day at Armfield's Hotel, where a succession of his friends visited him to say good-bye, and on the next day embarked with his party on board the *Ludgate Hill.* The ship was no luxurious liner, but a 'tramp,' carrying a consignment of horses and apes. Of these fellow-passengers the Stevensons had known nothing, but the discovery that the *Ludgate Hill* was to put in at Havre for her live cargo was not allowed to spoil either their tempers or their enjoyment of the voyage. "We agree," wrote Stevenson's mother in her journal, "to look upon it as an adventure, and make the best of it." The weather was very bad, and off Newfoundland Stevenson caught cold and was for a few days really ill. Yet he declared that throughout the voyage he was so happy his heart literally sang. He was a true son of his father and his grandfather in that he had always loved the sea and delighted in the free, hardy life on board ship, and his recent escape from the dreary life of the sick-room made everything bright before him.

The voyage came to an end, and for the second time Stevenson landed at New York,—not as before, a poor 'amateur emigrant,' a mere unit in a mass of people who were treated with scant courtesy, and driven whithersoever the officials would have them go. He was now a celebrity—"Quite the famous

party, in fact," as he wrote to Colvin—for whom a crowd of newspaper reporters anxiously waited, and who was the chief object of attention to the people who stood about the landing-stage and stared curiously at "the man who wrote *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*." One wonders what the keen-eyed American citizens thought of this carelessly dressed man, with his tall, attenuated figure, his thin, brown face, his eager, quickly glancing eyes, his long hair—now turned dark brown—his lithe, graceful movements and quick, significant gestures. They had little more than a passing glimpse of all these things, for Mr W. H. Low, a friend of the old Paris and Barbizon days, was waiting for Stevenson at the landing-stage, and at once carried him off. He stayed for a fortnight—which he spent in bed—at his friend's house in Newport, and for another fortnight at New York, where he was introduced to a few of Mr Low's friends, men famous in literature or in art. It was necessary for him to leave New York before the winter set in, and he was advised to try a sanatorium for consumptive patients that had lately been established near the shores of the Saranac lake, among the Adirondack mountains. Accordingly he and his family set out for Saranac early in October. They took a small verandahed cottage known as 'Baker's,' which Stevenson called "a wind-beleaguered, hill-top, hat-box." The surrounding country he loved, because it reminded him of the Highlands. There was a stream of running water within sight of the house that brought to

mind the burn of Pitlochry, and a "Perthshire hill" rose upon one side. On the other were to be seen some of the scattered houses of the village. The cost of living at Saranac was high, and the conditions not too comfortable. Throughout the winter the cold was intense, and the stoves that were kept lighted all over the house seemed to do little toward producing any sensation of warmth. Stevenson's wife and mother, as well as Valentine Roch, suffered very severely from colds and influenza, but he himself remained unaffected by the severe weather, and was able to work steadily. It was while he was pacing up and down the verandah of the Saranac cottage, one dark, clear night, with the thermometer below zero, that the idea for the *Master of Ballantrae* came to him. Gradually it took shape in his mind, and the outline of the story lay clear before him. "I need not tell my brothers of the craft," he says, "that I was now in the most interesting moment of an author's life; the hours that followed that night upon the balcony, and the following nights and days, whether walking abroad or lying wakeful in my bed, were hours of unadulterated joy." [1]

The character of the life lived at Saranac naturally brought the little company into close association and interdependence, and it was perhaps as an outcome of this that Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne began the practice of literary collaboration which ultimately produced *The Wrecker*, *The Ebb Tide*, and *The Wrong Box*. None of these books rank

[1] Graham Balfour's *Life*.

with his best work, and it is doubtful whether the collaboration was of real advantage to either partner. But it is certain that Stevenson enjoyed it. The comradeship pleased him, and he came back to his work with fresh zest after having for a time given it over into his stepson's hands.

But besides those connected with the making of books, there were other plans and possibilities to be discussed when the party gathered round the home-like log fire—the only one in the house—that burned in the living-room during the long evenings of that bitter winter. Saranac had never been looked upon as more than a temporary resting-place, and both ladies were looking forward eagerly to leaving it as soon as the spring weather should make travelling possible. The great question was, Where should they go next ? Stevenson gave his voice in favour of a yacht and a cruise along the Atlantic seaboard. To possess a yacht had been one of his dreams since his very early days, and though this was still beyond his reach, yet it would be something to hire a yacht and make believe for a time that the dream had come true. His income from literature, which during the years at Bournemouth had averaged about £400 annually, showed now a prospect of a large and rapid increase, and he had besides the sum of £2000 left him by his father. So ways and means were discussed and plans made ; the yacht was furnished and fitted up throughout according to the taste of the would-be voyagers, and nothing remained now but to find her.

The first steps were taken by Mrs Louis Stevenson. At the end of March she started for California to visit some of her own people. Stevenson remained at Saranac until the middle of April; then he spent some time at New York, and afterward went with his mother and stepson to an hotel near the mouth of the Manasquau, a river of New Jersey. It was here that a telegram arrived from his wife telling him that the yacht *Casco* might be hired for a trip among the islands of the South Seas, and without hesitation he telegraphed back authorizing her to close with the offer.

He quickly followed up his message, and by June 7th was at San Francisco. He fell in love at once with the graceful, birdlike *Casco*, and preparations for a start were hurried on. The yacht, in fact, was found not as seaworthy as she was beautiful, but defects of construction were overlooked in the anxiety to leave San Francisco, the climate of which was having a very bad effect upon Stevenson's health. By June 26th all was ready, and with a skilful, experienced skipper, four not entirely satisfactory deck hands, and five passengers, she put to sea and the great cruise began.

It had been decided, after much discussion, to start first for the Marquesas, a group of islands of volcanic origin that lay three thousand miles almost due west of San Francisco. For twenty-two days the *Casco* sailed across the Pacific Ocean, with no land in sight; and day by day Stevenson grew stronger and the whole party more and more

delighted with this 'dream come true.' On the twenty-third day, at dawn, they sighted land. "The first experience can never be repeated. The first love, the first sunrise, the first South Sea island are memories apart, and touched a virginity of sense."[1] By four o'clock the party had gathered on the deck waiting in the silence of expectation for the vision that would come with the light. Slowly the islands took shape—Nukahiva, for which the *Casco* was bound, rising gradually from a mass of cloud. "The land heaved up in peaks and rising vales; it fell in cliffs and buttresses; its colour ran through fifty modulations in a scale of pearl and rose and olive; and it was crowned above by two opalescent clouds."[2] The *Casco* headed her course along the shore. The surf broke heavily upon the beach and a few birds skimmed along the waters; but there was no sight or sound upon the island to tell of the presence of man or beast. Beyond the tall cliffs the mountains were piled up height upon height, bare for the most part, but sheltering here and there the waifs and strays of the forest below, that had crept up into their nooks and crevices. The *Casco* rounded a point, and entered a small inlet; and here, where the shores fell, a lovely pastoral scene was spread out before the eyes of the travellers. Under a grove of palm trees on the beach stood the native village; higher up upon the hillside were one or two houses of white settlers, each with its patch of cultivated

[1] *In the South Seas.* [2] *Ibid.*

ground; the song of birds, the bleating of lambs, the scent of a hundred fruits and flowers flowed forth to meet the travellers. "The schooner turned upon her heel; the anchor plunged. It was a small sound, a great event; my soul went down with these moorings whence no windlass may extract nor any diver fish it up; and I, and some part of my ship's company, were from that hour the bond-slaves of the isles of Vivien." [1]

Thus Stevenson gave in his allegiance to those kindly isles whose soft airs floating in from the sea were to bring him back to that "ordinary life of a human being" from which he had been so long shut out. He grew to love these new lands so dearly, that at times he left a pang of shame, as for some failure in loyalty toward the land of his fathers. But more and more as he travelled among the natives of the South Seas—whom no bribe, he said, would induce him to call savages—he felt how very closely all the families of the earth were related; and he loved to trace out analogies between the history and conditions of life of these Pacific tribes and those of the race he knew best—the Scots folk of the remote Highland districts at home. It is, of course, a truism that human nature is at bottom the same all the world over; yet it is rare to find the perception of this fact living and bringing forth fruit in a man as it lived and brought forth fruit in Stevenson. It taught him an unerring tact, by means of which he could draw near to men and

[1] *In the South Seas.*

women with whom he appeared to have nothing in common ; and here in the South Seas it unlocked the hearts of these gentle-hearted, dignified natives, so that they spoke to the strange white man with the sense of kinship strong upon them. " It is this sense of kinship that the traveller must rouse and share," says Stevenson, " or he had better content himself with travels from the blue bed to the brown." For three weeks the *Casco* lay at anchor in the harbour of Anaho, and the little hamlet was in a flutter of excitement. The resident white trader declared that never, in his experience, had the people worked so industriously at cotton-picking as during these weeks. Generally it was impossible to induce them to do more work than would suffice to provide them with the bare means of living ; but now every woman must have a new dress and every man a new shirt and trousers, that all might go in dignified fashion to pay their ceremonial visit to the *Casco.* Many parties of tall, handsome, graceful Marquesans were received upon the yacht. Stevenson himself acted as showman, and gravely exhibited all the splendours of fittings and furniture ; and the beautiful, well-kept ship received praise enough to satisfy even his proprietary pride. When the show was over the visitors were entertained in the cabin to biscuit, jam and syrup ; and, quite in the approved manner of tea-parties in England, the photograph album, with its portraits of Queen Victoria and other celebrities, was passed round. The delighted natives were not slow to offer hospitalities in return ; and

in their *paepae-hae,* or terraced houses, the party from the yacht were received with every sign of honour. There was much lamentation when the *Casco* left Anaho and sailed round the island to Taiohae, the port of entry. Here lived the French Resident—for the island was under the rule of France—and here was the prison, governed upon a novel and eminently lenient system, which allowed the prisoners to be out as much as they pleased all day if they returned, like children, to their home at night. When Stevenson paid his visit, the prison was empty; the men, he was informed, were out on the mountains hunting goats, and the women were paying calls.

At Taiohae a native pilot was taken on board to guide the ship through the difficult passage they were now approaching, and after a twelve-days' stay at Hiva-va—an island where cannibalism was still common—the *Casco* sailed for the Dangerous Archipelago—a sea thickly studded with low-lying coral islands. There were few lights to guide vessels through the intricate channels that wound between these islands, and no adequate chart; and the danger was increased by changing winds and confused currents. Several times the course was miscalculated, and the *Casco* found herself where, according to the reckoning, she certainly had no right to be. But at last Fakarava, the capital of the group, was reached in safety, and the *Casco* entered the lagoon. A fortnight was spent at Fakarava, Stevenson and his family leaving their

ship, and living in a native house among the palms. In the last week of September they sailed for Tahiti.

Tahiti is generally considered by travellers the most beautiful of all the beautiful islands of the South Seas. But it threatened at first to be an unfortunate island for the Stevensons. Louis had caught cold at Fakarava, and by the time he landed at Papeete, the capital of the Society group, the cough and fever had increased alarmingly. After a few days he grew a little better, but he did not like Papeete, and it was agreed to go round to Taravao, on the south side of the island. Twice during this two days' passage the *Casco* was nearly wrecked; and when at last the party landed at Taravao, it was only to find a close, mosquito-infested atmosphere, in which Stevenson grew rapidly worse. The Captain and Lloyd Osbourne set off on an expedition inland, but came back with a report that they could find no one who had horses or carriage for the removal of the invalid save a Chinaman, and he was unwilling to allow them to be hired. Mrs Stevenson therefore set off next day, and by her entreaties induced the Chinaman to let her have wagon and horses. Stevenson was placed in the wagon, and, with the help of Valentine Roch, his wife managed to bring him safely over sixteen miles of rough road, crossed by twenty-one streams, to the small village of Tautira. By the time he was installed in the miserable house which was all they could secure for him he was in a state of collapse.

Next day they were visited by Princess Moë, the Queen of Raiatea, who, hearing that a white man

was lying very ill at Tautira, came over to see if she could give any help. As soon as the patient was a little recovered she invited the whole party to live with her in the commodious house of Ori, the sub-chief of the village. Ori, with his wife and family, willingly moved into one of the native huts. In his new quarters Stevenson grew rapidly better, and it seemed as if, for a time, their troubles were over. Bad news, however, came from the schooner. It was discovered, first, that the jib-boom was sprung, and then, when that had been repaired, the two masts were found to be almost eaten out with dry-rot, so that it was a miracle that the voyage so far had been made without accident. With all possible precautions the schooner put back to Papeete for repairs, and the Stevensons were confined to the island until such time as she could be made sea-worthy. They spent their days very happily. Stevenson was now quite well again, and revelling in the soft air, the lovely scenes, and the delightful people that surrounded him. " I write to you from fairyland," said Mrs Stevenson in a letter to Sir Sidney Colvin, " where we are living in a fairy story, the guests of a beautiful brown princess." Her husband and her son, she went on to tell, roamed all day about the island, Louis dressed in a pyjama suit of light striped flannel, Lloyd in a light flannel shirt and pareu—that is, a large blue and white cotton window curtain, twisted about the waist, and hanging a little below the bare knees. Neither wore shoes or stockings, and both had wreaths of

artificial flowers made of dried pandunis leaf round their hats. They bathed in the sea almost every day, they hunted for shells, and clambered over rocks, and lay luxuriously basking in the sun all through the month of November. They enjoyed the novel food—the luncheons of raw fish, with sauce of cocoanut milk mixed with sea-water and lime juice, bananas roasted between hot stones in a little pit in the ground, and eaten with cocoanut cream, roast pig served with miti, and palm-tree salad; and Stevenson wrote home that at some of the island feasts he had "been known to apply four times for pig." Princess Moë arranged entertainments, at which the old songs and dances of Tahiti were performed for their benefit. When she was recalled to Papeete by command of the king, Ori became their host. He was a fine fellow, "a life-guardsman in appearance, six foot three in bare feet; deep and broad in proportion; unconsciously English to an absurd extent." He adopted Stevenson into his clan and changed names with him, so that the Englishman henceforth might claim the designation of Terütera. The whole party adapted themselves readily and happily to the customs of the island, and established the warmest relations with their entertainers. To Mrs Stevenson these weeks on shore came as a welcome respite from life on board the yacht; for to her the tour was not one of unmixed enjoyment. "I hate the sea," she said, "and am afraid of it; . . . but I love the tropic weather and the wild people and to see my two boys so happy."

As soon as his health allowed him Stevenson resumed his work. Before he started on his tour in the South Seas a firm of American publishers, Messrs MacClure, had offered him £2000 for a book descriptive of his travels, and this money was to help pay the expenses of the voyage. At every place, therefore, he busied himself in collecting materials. At Tautira he gathered a great store of songs and legends, and wrote two ballads, "The Feast of Famine" and "The Song of Rahero," founded upon traditions of the islands. In addition to work upon his travels he resumed and almost finished *The Master of Ballantrae.*

December came and still the *Casco* was not ready. Bad weather had set in, and the seas along the coast ran too high for the small native boats to attempt the voyage to Papeete, while swollen rivers rendered a journey across the island impossible. Stevenson's money was all gone, and the daily food of the party was supplied by their generous hosts. Day by day their anxiety increased, and the sympathetic natives joined with them in watching eagerly for the white sails of the *Casco.* At last Ori with a party of young men braved the stormy seas, and went in a whaleboat to Papeete. They were delayed a week beyond the expected time, but at last, to the relief and delight of the whole village, they appeared, bringing money and stores and a letter from the captain of the *Casco.* There was a grand dinner next day, at which a basket of champagne was produced. Ori drank the glass that was poured

out for him with delight. "I shall drink it continually," he said, and poured out another glass for himself. "What is the cost of it by the bottle?" He was told, and he put down his glass with its contents untasted. "It is not fit that even kings should drink a wine so expensive," he solemnly pronounced; and so he forswore this new delight. On Christmas Day, 1888, the Stevensons left Tahiti in the *Casco,* bound for Honolulu. The parting from their island friends, whom during their two months' stay they had really learned to love, was so painful, that one and all agreed a succession of such experiences would be too harrowing to be borne; short stays and no close intimacies must be henceforth the rule.

After considerable delay, through calms and contrary winds, the *Casco* at length reached Honolulu. Mrs Stevenson's daughter, who had married and was now Mrs Strong, was living in Honolulu and waiting to welcome them. The yacht was sent back to San Francisco, a house was taken on the coast just outside the town, and here they established themselves, waiting for the summer, when they intended to return to England. Valentine Roch had gone back to America, but a native cook, Ah Fu, engaged in Nukahiva, was proving himself a treasure in the kitchen. The stay at Honolulu Stevenson described as "a spasm of activity chequered with champagne parties." The activity had to do with his literary work, which he made haste to take in hand, for *The Master of Ballantrae*

was being published as a serial in *Scribner's Magazine,* and the end was not yet written. To finish it was, Stevenson said, the hardest job he ever had to do; and in May he wrote that *The Master* was finished, and he himself quite a wreck. The 'champagne parties' included all those festivities to which his step-daughter, who had many acquaintances in this island, introduced him, and especially the festivities of the royal palace. With the king he formed a close intimacy which almost amounted to a friendship, and he joined with zest in all that was going on. But on the whole he did not care for Honolulu. He had not been really well since he left the ship, though he had never been entirely incapacitated, and it very soon became clear that he was not yet fitted to face even a comparatively cold climate. The idea of returning to England was therefore given up. He lacked courage, he said, to return to his old life of the house and the sick-room after these active months passed in the open air. Plans were therefore made for another cruise, and in the meantime he made short voyages to islands within easy reach. The most notable of these was the visit he paid to Molokai, where, by special permission, he spent a week in the leper settlement, in which Father Damien had laboured so heroically, and where, not two months before, he had died. With a party of Roman Catholic sisters, and about a dozen lepers who were being sent out to the settlement, Stevenson travelled by steamer from Honolulu to Molokai. "I do not know how it would have

been with me," he said, "had the sisters not been there. My horror of the horrible is about my weakest point; but the moral loveliness at my elbow blotted all else out; and when I found that one of them was crying, poor soul, quietly under her veil, I cried a little myself; then I felt as right as a trivet, only a little crushed to be there so uselessly."[1] When the boat arrived at the landing stairs hundreds of lepers, "pantomime masks in poor human flesh," came down to meet the sisters and the new patients, but Stevenson was able to greet them without any sign of disgust, and landed calmly with the rest of the party. The leper settlement was built on a low, bare, stony promontory behind which the cliff rose like a great wall, shutting it off from the rest of the island. A cluster of little brown wooden houses and a church stood on each side of the promontory, "as bare almost as bathing machines upon a beach"; and all was "unsightly, sour, northerly," sanctified only by the "horror of moral beauty" that brooded over it.

During his stay Stevenson played tennis with the leper girls, went to tea with the sisters, and walked about freely among the patients. He heard a great deal of Father Damien and his labours, so that when two years later he read in an Australian religious paper a letter from Dr Hyde, a Presbyterian minister in Honolulu, depreciating and slandering this man whom he regarded as a hero, his indignation was aroused. He wrote the celebrated open letter

[1] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.*

to Dr Hyde, which was published first in Sydney and afterward in Edinburgh. It laid him open to a charge of libel, but for this he did not care. He faced the ruin that might come cheerfully, that he might clear the memory of one whom he considered to be a great man.

It was decided that in the next cruise the Gilbert Islands should be visited. So far Stevenson's experience had been confined to high, rocky, very thinly populated islands, under foreign domination. The Gilbert Islands are in almost every particular of a quite different character. The group lies near the Equator, and consists of sixteen low islands, of coral formation, thickly populated, and at that time almost every island was governed by an independent king. The inhabitants are darker and shorter than the races living in the 'high' islands, as well as more energetic and more ferocious.

During May and June preparations for the cruise were going on. A trading schooner, the *Equator*, was chartered, and stores were laid in. Experience had taught the Stevensons what was most needed in the regions to which they were going, and besides provisions for the voyage they carried with them a magic lantern, an American hand organ, cigars, tobacco, fish-hooks, combs, turkey-red calicoe, a fiddle and a guitar for the benefit of the natives. Stevenson's mother had decided not to accompany them on this cruise and had returned to Scotland. The rest of the party, including Ah Fu, set sail on June 24th, 1889, while King Kalakana stood on the

Father Damien 128

From a drawing by Edward Clifford

Photo Hollyer

shore waving his hand in farewell, and his band of native musicians sent sad parting strains over the water.

As soon as the *Equator* was well away from Honolulu Stevenson's health began to improve. He felt more and more strongly that the life that would give him the greatest amount of health and happiness was a life on the sea. But the expenses were very heavy, and to meet them it was necessary that some new work should at once be begun. Very soon after they left Honolulu a chance incident suggested an idea for a story. This was talked over by Stevenson and his stepson, and they set to work to write the book together, intending to complete it as quickly as possible and send it to a publisher from Samoa, which was in direct communication with London.

The schooner arrived without accident at Butaritari, on the island of Great Makin. The stretch of land by the shore was crowded with brown-roofed houses; and the King's palace, with its roof of corrugated iron, shone out in splendour on one side. The party landed and found the town silent and deserted. As they advanced toward the palace they met no one, but looking in through the open fronts of the houses they saw groups of men, women and children all lying fast asleep. They reached the palace and entered the summer parlour, where the King and his court, some twenty in all, were assembled. The King, Tebureimoa, lolled upon a mat. He was a corpulent, drowsy, timorous-looking man,

dressed in pyjamas "which sorrowfully misbecame his bulk." He took little interest in the new-comers, and gave them permission through his interpreter—"an American darkey, runaway ship's cook"—to make what arrangements they pleased for their lodging. Within an hour of leaving the palace they were established in the house of Maka, the Hawaiian missionary, who was then absent from the island. The night passed quietly, but the next day they discovered the reason for the state of things they had observed on their arrival. The town was sleeping off the effects of a drunken debauch, and thus preparing for a fresh debauch on the morrow. Nine days before, the King had, in celebration of the fourth of July, the day of American Independence, removed the tapu (or taboo) upon intoxicating liquors, and ever since he and his subjects had been almost constantly drunk. The danger to the white inhabitants of the town was great; for the most trifling circumstance might, in the present temper of the natives, lead to an outbreak. Great efforts were made to induce the King to re-impose the tapu. A deputation was sent to the palace, and he was informed by the wife of the consular agent for the United States, who acted as interpreter, that Mr Stevenson was an intimate, personal friend of Queen Victoria's, and that if he or his family suffered injury or annoyance the offence would be immediately reported, and a man-of-war sent out to execute vengeance. It was, as Stevenson says, "scarce the fact," but "rather a just and necessary parable

of the fact corrected for latitude." It had an effect upon the King, though not the effect desired; he tapu'd the missionary's house, but refused to stop the drinking. So things went on for another week, and then, when Stevenson and his family were sitting in the lamplight after dinner under a trellis in the enclosure belonging to the house, a missile suddenly struck the table and rebounded past his ear. "Three inches to one side," he says, "and this page had never been written, for the thing travelled like a cannon ball." The next evening, under exactly similar circumstances, the incident was repeated, to the general alarm, for those who knew the natives well declared that it meant more than ordinary mischief. One of the two liquor stores on the island had already refused to supply the natives with strong drink; Stevenson now approached the keeper of the other with urgent representations of the threatened danger. Preparations were being made for a feast at which the chiefs from tributary islands were to be present with their followers; and if the drunken orgy continued it could scarcely be hoped that this would pass without an outbreak. Fortunately the store-keeper listened and was persuaded, and the supply was stopped. There remained now the danger from the fury of the baffled natives; but this too was averted, for early next morning the King re-imposed the tapu, and the island returned to its customary sobriety. This was the only time during all his wanderings that Stevenson was in danger of bodily harm from a native population;

and even the inhabitants of Butaritari, their fit of madness over, treated him with the friendliest consideration. He stayed for several weeks longer without adventure of any kind; showed the magic lantern and took various photographs; then when the *Equator*, which had been absent on a trading cruise, returned, the party went on board and sailed away.

They visited next Apemama, a large island ruled by King Tembinok. "There is one great personage in the Gilberts," says Stevenson, "Tembinok of Apemama: solely conspicuous, the hero of song, the butt of gossip." Scarcely was the *Equator* moored off the north side of the island before preparations were made for the King to come aboard, and presently, with a crowd of followers in attendant vessels, he put off from the shore. He was, like Tebureimoa, heavy and corpulent, and his gait was "dull, stumbling, and elephantine." He had "a beaked profile, like Dante's in the mask, a mane of long black hair, the eye brilliant, imperious, and inquiring." His voice was "shrill, powerful, and uncanny, with a note like a sea-bird's. Where there are no fashions, none to set them, few to follow them if they were set, and none to criticize, he dresses 'to his own heart.' Now he wears a woman's frock, now a naval uniform; now (and more usually) figures in a masquerade costume of his own design; trousers and a singular jacket with shirt tails, the cut and fit wonderful for island workmanship, the material always handsome, sometimes green velvet,

sometimes cardinal red silk. This masquerade becomes him admirably. In a woman's frock he looks ominous and weird beyond belief." [1]

Stevenson was especially anxious to spend some time in Apemama, partly because he wished to study this renowned Tembinok, partly because the old customs of the islands were preserved there to a greater degree than anywhere else. But no one was allowed to land without the King's permission, and this was not too readily given. The captain of the *Equator* preferred Stevenson's request almost as soon as the King came on board, dwelling on the would-be visitor's virtues, and the high position he held in his own land. The King listened, but, without making any answer, began to talk upon another subject, and did not refer in any way to the petition before leaving the ship in the evening. But it was noticed that as he sat at meals with the strangers he intently studied the face of each in turn. Next day he came again, and once more the faces of the party were the objects of his thoughtful scrutiny. Not until the afternoon, however, did he give his answer, but when it came it was a favourable one. "I look your eye. You good man. You no lie," he said to Stevenson, and henceforward he showed the utmost kindness and liberality toward them. He allowed them to choose a site for their settlement, and this his people cleared the next day, and erected upon it two maniaps, or tents, and two native houses. By dusk all was finished, and the whole enclosure, which

[1] *In the South Seas.*

was called 'Equator Town,' in honour of the ship, tapu'd, so that there was no danger of interference from the natives; and two very interesting and pleasant months were spent in this novel dwelling. All the members of the party soon became great favourites with the King, and were free at all times to visit the palace, where he lived with his mother, his sister, and a vast company of wives. These wives he usually referred to as "my pamily." There were no male officers in the palace; all positions of trust were held by the wives. They were key-bearers, treasurers, wardens of the armoury, the napery, and the stores, sentries, guards, and servants. They had in charge vast hoards of miscellaneous articles that the King had collected, for, in spite of his shrewdness, he had a mania for buying every article, useful or useless, that was brought by traders to the island. Clocks, musical boxes, blue spectacles, umbrellas, knitted waistcoats, rolls of stuff, tools, rifles, fowling-pieces, medicines, European foods, sewing-machines, stoves—chest after chest in the palace was crammed with these things. Yet that member of the 'pamily' in whose charge any particular article was placed could always produce it, in perfect order, at whatever moment it was called for; and the other duties of the household were performed with equal efficiency.

Over all his subjects Tembinok's authority was absolute, and his visitors soon learned to admire the firmness of his rule, and the ability with which he managed the innumerable concerns in which

he was engaged. Besides being the sole ruler he was the sole trader in the island, and made his bargains—except with regard to the treasures from Europe already mentioned—with great shrewdness. He had learnt to read and write from the missionaries whom he had readily received into the island, but whom, later, when, as he believed, they began to aim at a domination other than spiritual, he had banished. "I send him away ship," he explained to Stevenson, and every visitor or settler who had attempted to interfere with his plans had met with the same fate. His name was a terror both at home and in all the islands round, for, though he was neither cruel nor vindictive, when his wrath was once aroused his vengeance was swift and terrible.

With this man Stevenson lived in intimate association for two months, and when the time came for the visitors to leave Apemama, the King was deeply dejected. No efforts of consolation made by his 'pamily' had any effect. He himself took the party on board, shook each one by the hand and departed almost in silence, and they, although they felt for him none of the affection that they had felt for Ori and Moë, were sorry to say good-bye to one whom they really respected and admired.

The *Equator* touched once more at Butaritari, and then went on to the Samoan islands. On December 7th she arrived at Apia, the capital and port of Upolu, the chief island of the group. The Samoan are 'high' or volcanic islands, and here, to his great delight, Stevenson was "once more

refreshed with the sight of mountains." "For six months," he says, "we had seen no spot of earth so high as an ordinary cottage. Our path had been still on the flat sea, our dwelling upon unerected coral, our diet from the pickle-tub or out of tins; I had learned to welcome shark's flesh for a variety; and a mountain, an onion, an Irish potato or a beef-steak, had been long lost to sense and dear to aspiration."[1] The fruits and other luxuries of Upolu were therefore highly prized.

The time for which the *Equator* had been chartered having expired, she proceeded on her homeward journey, and Stevenson settled in a cottage just outside the town. After a short time he accepted the invitation given him by Mr H. J. Moors, an American merchant, and with his family became the guest of that gentleman at his house in Apia. The removal was made chiefly in the interests of Stevenson's work, for he was busy collecting material for his book on the South Seas, and was glad to avail himself of the help that was courteously given him by the various European officials and white inhabitants of the town. From them he obtained much information with regard to the late war, which had placed the Samoan islands under the joint rule of the three great powers—Germany, England, and the United States. A native king, Malietoa Laupepa, had been set up, but his position among the native population was not one of great authority. He had a kinsman, Mataafa, whose claim to the throne

[1] *In the South Seas.*

was almost, if not quite, as strong as his own, but who, having during the late troubles been active against the Germans, had been quite overlooked in the recent arrangements. Mataafa naturally expected that his kinsman would give him an honourable position among his counsellors, especially as he was extremely popular in the island. But Laupepa persisted in ignoring him, and Mataafa, deeply offended, set up a kind of opposition court just outside the capital. To the impartial inquirer, who was endeavouring honestly to find out the facts of the case, a mass of confused and contradictory evidence was forthcoming from the partisans on either side, and it was with this mass of evidence that Stevenson proceeded to deal. It was a difficult and a wearying task, but he gave to it the patient industry and untiring enthusiasm which went into all his work, and in *A Footnote to History,* which he afterward published, he gave a most valuable exposition of the political situation in Samoa.

From Apia he made various expeditions to other parts of the island, and came gradually to the conclusion that Upolu would be the most favourable spot for the winter home that he had now resolved to establish. The island was not as beautiful as others that he had visited, and its people were not specially attractive. But the climate suited him; he had no illness such as had troubled him during his stay at Honolulu, and he had been able to work regularly during the whole time he had spent at Upolu. Moreover, and this was a crowning advan-

tage, the means of communication with Europe were exceptionally good. The monthly steamers between Sydney and San Francisco called at Apia ; a German steamer, the *Lübeck*, ran regularly between Apia and Sydney, and the New Zealand boat, the *Richmond*, called on her circular trip from Auckland to Tahiti. Stevenson bought, therefore, about three hundred acres of land lying on the heights behind Apia. The whole tract was covered with bush, amid which rose at intervals giant forest trees ; even the narrow, winding path bordered with limes that led through it was overgrown and in places almost impassable. The eastern boundary was formed by the Vaisigano, the principal river of the island. On the west side ran a stream made up of a number of mountain torrents that came rushing down the steep side of the Vaea Mountain ; and it was from this stream and its four chief tributaries that Stevenson gave to his estate the name of 'Vailima' or 'Five Waters.'

Early in February the party sailed for Sydney, intending to go on from there to England. But unfortunately Stevenson took cold, and a bad attack of hæmorrhage followed. Both he and his wife felt that there was nothing to be done but to return to those regions where for eighteen months he had lived without one of these distressing attacks. They still hoped, however, to be able to pay a visit to England later in the year, and a telegram was sent off to the waiting friends at home : "Return Islands four months. Home September." The next

thing was to find a ship, and after having been twice absolutely refused, Mrs Stevenson at last induced the owners of a trading steamer, the *Janet Nicoll*, then on the point of starting on a cruise among the islands, to allow her party of three a passage. The voyage quickly restored the invalid, and with no other adventure than a fire in the cabin, in which all Stevenson's manuscripts were in great danger of destruction, they came to Apia, where the steamer put in for a few days. Then they went on to the Gilbert and Marshall groups, putting in for a few hours at one island after another, but making no prolonged stay anywhere. At Apemama they saw King Tembinok, and heard from him the news of various disasters, notably an attack of measles, from which his island had suffered since their last visit. Then the vessel turned southward, and calling at New California on the way, went on direct to Sydney. Stevenson was left behind at Noumea, where he wished to inspect the French convict settlement, and followed his wife and stepson a few days later.

The state of his health when he arrived at Sydney made it clear that there could be no visit to England that year. The improvement shown at the beginning of the voyage had not been maintained, and a second hæmorrhage had still further reduced his strength. Lloyd Osbourne, therefore, went on alone to England, with instructions to make the arrangements necessary for his stepfather's prolonged absence abroad, and to send out the Skerryvore furniture

to Samoa. Stevenson and his wife, after a short stay at Sydney, during which he was confined to his room, returned in October 1890 to Upolu, where a considerable portion of his land had by this time been cleared, and a four-roomed wooden house erected to serve as a temporary dwelling-place.

CHAPTER VIII: *Vailima*

SINCE the old days in Heriot Row Stevenson had not known what it was to have a home; for Skerryvore and Hyères, where he had spent the longest periods, can scarcely be regarded as anything but experimental settlements, liable to be broken up at a moment's notice. He never really took possession of them in the sense of associating them with his future plans or impressing his personality upon them. For this attitude of detachment his health, which made it impossible for him to settle in his own country, was mainly responsible. But there was about him also a natural aloofness that made all bonds, even the kindly bonds of home, intolerable. The detachment from material things, which in his youth he had advocated with such whimsical earnestness, was, shorn of the absurdities and extravagances with which he had chosen to invest it, really a fundamental part of his nature, and was somehow expressed, his friends tell us, in his frail body, his quick, graceful movements, his mobile face and bright, glancing eyes. To think of Robert Louis Stevenson as an ordinary British householder, interested in his chairs and tables, absorbed in his garden, and deeply concerned in the small affairs of his parish, would have struck even his casual acquaintances as a manifest incongruity. It seemed almost as if the home-making instinct, which to men like Sir Walter Scott supplies the motive power of life, was in him entirely wanting.

But, after all his wanderings, here in the uttermost parts of the earth the desire to make a home for himself and his family came upon him, and he set to work with characteristic directness and energy. For three and a half years he was as absorbed in clearing and planting and building on his estate of the Five Waters as ever Scott had been in the development of Abbotsford, and as interested in his "blacks and chocolates" as Sir Walter in his Tweedside peasants. "*Nothing*," he wrote to Colvin in November 1890, "is so interesting as weeding, clearing and path-making." He was obliged to make stern resolutions to confine himself to the house, or no literary work at all would have been done; and, with the heavy expenses of establishing a plantation and building a house added to those already incurred in the South Sea cruises, there was urgent need for this money-making labour. But often the temptation to be "bossing his labourers" and working with his hands at outdoor matters became too strong to be resisted, and he would steal half-guiltily away. He had always exulted in manual labour, probably because the chances of undertaking it had come so seldom in his life; and now, in the kindly Samoan air, he really felt that he could work like other men. He laboured with his 'boys,' cutting down bush and burning out tree-stumps till his hands were blistered and torn. He fought great fights with the tuitui, or sensitive plant, that singular, insidious thing which was the deadliest enemy the island planters had to deal with; and

The Residence at Vailima

Photo J Patrick

he had hand-to-hand skirmishes with the wild lime that fought so tenaciously with its spines and elastic suckers. Moreover, he conceived the plan of making a path up the Vaituliga—one of his 'five streams'—single-handed, and stole away gleefully to this work whenever he could make an opportunity, labouring hard and secretly so that his path might "burst upon the public complete." He was stung by poisonous plants, and nearly hung by the tough lianas; he waded knee-deep in ice-cold streams, and came home looking like a "mud-statue"—and all this during November and December, the months which, had he been in England, he would have passed in a sick-room with terrors of colds and alarms of hæmorrhages. It is, after all, not wonderful that he loved his home in the South Seas.

Each day, moreover, had its unexpected alarms and excursions. First it was the black sow which got loose and for twelve hours baffled the attempts of the entire family and eight hired 'boys' to recapture her; then it was the two great New Zealand hack-horses which were overdriven by a zealous but inexperienced boy, and whose lives were only saved by a prompt and vigorous rubbing down—with underclothing from Mrs Stevenson's store, as being the readiest thing to hand. One evening all the horses got out of the paddock, went across and smashed the nearest neighbour's garden into a big hole; on another day all the hired labourers left in a body through a misunderstanding with the 'ganger.' After such adventures the bursting of

a case of kerosene in the kitchen, and the mistake made by the carpenter's horse, who planted his foot in a nest of fourteen eggs, and "made an omelette of our hopes," were minor excitements; and an occasional failure in the food supply which reduced dinner to "one avocado pear between Fanny and me, a ship's biscuit for the guidman, white bread for the missis, and red wine for the twa," was merely an unremarkable domestic incident.

Thus far 'Stevenson the Planter'; but there is also that "less estimable character" (as he himself puts it), Stevenson 'the Writer of Books,' to be considered. In spite of frequent truancies, this Stevenson also managed to make considerable way during the two closing months of 1890. He worked industriously at *The Wrecker* and the South Sea book, writing some chapters as many as four times before they seemed to him as good as he could make them. The South Sea book, in particular, gave him endless trouble. He had accumulated such a vast mass of material that, as he said, he staggered under it. How to manipulate it, to build it up so that it should become "jointed and moving," was the problem that troubled him; and as he sent home one instalment of manuscript after another to his trusted friend and critic, Colvin, it became evident that he had not been able to command the lightness of touch that had so delightfully distinguished his early books of travel. Mrs Stevenson, whose criticism of her husband's work was seldom at fault, had, when the book was in its earliest stages, put

her finger upon the weak point. Louis had, she said, the most enchanting material in the world, but she was afraid he was going to spoil it. "He has taken it into his Scotch Stevenson head that a stern duty lies before him, and that his book must be a sort of scientific, historic, impersonal thing." Such a book was quite outside the range of Robert Louis Stevenson's powers, versatile as he was, and it was foredoomed to at least comparative failure. He himself, however, was very hopeful that in the end he would be able to make a book worthy of his material, and he went on courageously though somewhat wearily. In the respites he allowed himself from this heavy labour he found refreshment in writing verses and in planning a new story to be called "The High Woods of Ulufanua," the idea of which, he says, shot through him like a bullet while he was working alone in the depths of his tangled forest.

By the end of the year both Stevenson and his wife were growing tired of life in the tiny cottage. There was no place where he could write without interruption, and no accommodation for the servants who were necessary to relieve him and his wife from constant household drudgery. They had one 'boy' for domestic work—a German named Paul, who had been a cook and steward, "a glutton of work," but an "inveterate bungler, a man with twenty thumbs." His ideas of household cleanliness were such that Mrs Stevenson preferred to do much of the work herself. In addition she superintended the pigs

and the poultry, and worked hard to make a garden where vegetables for the use of the household could be grown. Consequently she suffered severely from overwork, and when she was incapacitated her duties fell upon her husband. Both of them, therefore, were looking forward eagerly to the time when the new house, which was being built a little higher up the hill, should be completed.

By January it was so far advanced that Stevenson set off to Sydney to fetch his mother and Lloyd Osbourne, who were waiting for him there on their way out from England. At Sydney he spent nearly a month, working hard at his book and living quietly and carefully ; but in spite of his care he had a sharp attack of illness, and when the time came to start on the return voyage, he was carried on board the *Lübeck* "a wonderful wreck." The sea air, as usual, wrought a great and immediate improvement, but he was still very weak when, toward the end of February, he arrived at Samoa. The new house was not yet habitable, so Stevenson and his wife made shift to use one of its lower rooms as a bedroom, that the elder Mrs Stevenson might be accommodated in the cottage. She stayed, however, only for a short time, then went back to Australia to wait until things should be farther advanced, and did not return until the beginning of May. With her came Mrs Stevenson's daughter, Mrs Strong, and her boy, Austin ; and the family, thus enlarged, settled down in its new quarters.

The house as it then stood was fairly large and

commodious, but later it was found insufficient for the party, and another building about equal in size was added. Behind stood the kitchen and a native house for the cook, and round about were grouped milking-sheds, pig-pens, and stables. The original cottage was moved from its first site, and set up again about a hundred yards from the new house, where it provided additional bedrooms and storage accommodation. All three buildings were of wood painted a dark green, two-storeyed, and with roofs of red corrugated iron. On the ground floor a verandah ran round the front and one side of the house, and above it was built another in front of the library, which occupied the whole of that floor. This, however, made the library so dark that Stevenson found that he could not work in it. He therefore made a new study and bedroom for himself by having one-half of the verandah boarded and roofed in. This little chamber he furnished with a small bedstead, a plain deal table, two book-cases, two chairs and a few pictures, and here most of his work was done.

In front of the house a beautiful lawn of smooth green couch grass was made, and around this a hibiscus hedge was planted. It grew rapidly and was soon six feet high, and a mass of scarlet blossoms. A little below the house the river made a fall of about twelve feet, and formed a delightful bathing pool which was arched over with orange trees. The garden, which was Mrs Stevenson's special care, lay at a little distance on the left bank of the river;

vegetables such as beans, cabbages, tomatoes and asparagus, introduced from Europe, grew freely in that rich soil, and many fruits and vegetables natural to the island were also cultivated. Higher up the stream were banana patches, whose produce formed an important part of the food of the household. There were stretches of pasture land for the cattle, swampy plots planted with taro, which was used as a substitute for the potato, several acres planted with pine-apples, and a fine plantation of kava shrubs, from the powdered root of which the Samoan national drink is made. Bread-fruit, cocoa-nuts, oranges, guavas and mangoes were cultivated, and produced abundant crops, and many other tropical fruits grew in a wild or semi-wild state. All the hedges were formed of fragrant lime trees, and limes were so plentiful that they were used for scouring the kitchen floor and tables. East and west and south the clearing was shut in by thick bush and lofty forests; northward the land fell away to the sea, and Stevenson, looking out from his little writing chamber, could see "a nick of the blue Pacific."

A large part of the estate was given up to plantations of cacao, which Stevenson and his friend Mr H. J. Moors were making great efforts to induce the natives of Upolu to cultivate. One of the most characteristic pictures given by Stevenson of the life at Vailima is that which shows the whole family engaged in planting cacao. "You should have seen us; the verandah was like an Irish bog; our hands and faces were bedaubed with soil. . . . The

cacao (you must understand) has to be planted at first in baskets of plaited cocoa-leaf. From four to ten natives were plaiting these in the woodshed. Four boys were digging up soil and bringing it by the boxful to the verandah. Lloyd and I and Belle . . . were filling the baskets, removing stones and lumps of clay; Austin and Fauma carried them when full to Fanny, who planted a seed in each, and then set them, packed close, in the corner of the verandah. From twelve on Friday till five P.M. on Saturday we planted the first 1500, and more than 700 of the second lot. You cannot dream how filthy we were, and we were all properly tired."

As large tracts of the estate were thus cleared and planted a considerable number of regular outdoor hands became necessary. The new house also required its staff of servants. Little by little a small colony was established at Vailima, to which Stevenson was master, friend, teacher, doctor, lawgiver and earthly Providence. At first European and Colonial servants were tried. But it was found that these could not adapt themselves to the work and customs of a Samoan estate. The German cook Paul—who came into a fortune and went home to 'Hie Germanie'—was succeeded by another of the same nationality, who was equally zealous and equally incompetent, and who quarrelled with the white housemaid. The white overseer declared that manual labour was the one thing that never agreed with him, and objected to being called in the morning on the ground that a man ought to wake up "natural

like." Various other white servants were tried, until the members of the household felt that they could bear no more. Finally a clean sweep was made, and a staff of natives installed, and then, though there were still troubles, things went more smoothly. Of his Samoan servants Stevenson speaks freely in his letters. Henry Siméle, a "chiefling" from a neighbouring island, was the overseer of the plantation. Stevenson began by loathing him, but the loathing passed into respect and respect into liking, until Henry became a real friend. After work was over Stevenson gave him lessons in English, or, as the pupil called it, "long explessions." He rubbed up his own almost forgotten arithmetical lore to teach this Samoan chiefling decimals; and sometimes by the unaccustomed fire—for the new house contained two fire-places, though these were seldom used—Henry was entertained with "the fairy tales of civilization." Lafaele, the steward, known in the household as 'the archangel,' was, in spite of his superstition and his dullness, another favourite; he was a great strong Hercules of a man, devoted to 'Papa,' as he called Stevenson, and capable of braving even the terrors of a dark night, with the spirits of the dead crowding, as he firmly believed, about his path, to come at his chief's bidding. Lafaele's wife, Fauma, Stevenson's "bronze candlestick," was, if not particularly useful, "highly decorative" and good-tempered. "The weird figure of Fauma," wrote Stevenson in one of his letters to Mr Colvin, "is in the room washing

my windows, in a black lava-lava (kilt), with a red handkerchief hanging from round her neck between her breasts; not another stitch; her hair close-cropped and oiled." All the house-servants at Vailima went about bare-footed and very scantily clothed. Sosimo, the butler, who waited at table, wore only, on ordinary occasions, a piece of calico draping his tattooed waist and loins, but his bearing and manner had a noble dignity that made the attendance of this tall, brown-skinned, finely-formed native at Stevenson's beautifully appointed modern dinner-table appear not incongruous but picturesque. Sosimo was also Stevenson's faithful and devoted personal attendant, who delighted in performing any and every service that his master might require. On one occasion, Mrs Strong tells us, the cook was absent, and Stevenson therefore contented himself with ordering a luncheon of bread and cheese. But at the proper time Sosimo served up an excellent omelette, a good salad, and perfect coffee. "Who cooked this?" asked Stevenson; and Sosimo replied, "I did." "Then great is your wisdom," said his master; but Sosimo bowed his fine head and answered, "Great is my love."

There were, as a rule, six or eight servants in the house and three or four outside men, who worked with a gang of hired labourers, which varied, according to the work in hand, from six to thirty. The Samoan works best under a strict and orderly system, and this Stevenson was at pains to establish. Outdoors and indoors a fixed daily routine was followed.

Each servant had his list of duties and knew that their exact fulfilment would be insisted upon. Nothing delighted Stevenson more than to see among the members of this considerable household signs of the development of a clan spirit, such as had formerly existed among the Highlanders of his native country. To bring this to perfection was the ideal he set before himself, and to which, in a great measure, he attained. His people learned to come to him for advice in their private and domestic matters, and he directed, reprimanded and praised, entering into their affairs with the keenest interest, and by his quick sympathy speedily appreciating the native point of view, and learning to deal wisely with native prejudices. He attempted to create common interests and common ambitions. He punished, when punishments were necessary, in the sight of the whole community. For slight offences fines were imposed, which were handed over to the charities of the religious denomination to which the offender belonged; or if he did not choose to submit to this, he might be paid his wages, and depart. In more serious cases a solemn Bed of Justice was held. Stevenson sat at the head of the table, with members of his family on either hand. The servants made a ring upon the floor. Evidence was given, and the verdict pronounced; and then came what was considered the heaviest part of the guilty man's punishment. The 'high chief' addressed him at length, dwelling on the heinousness of his fault, and the grief it had caused to all the

household. "Fuaali," said Stevenson on one such occasion, "you have confessed that you stole the cooked pigs, the taro, the palusamis, the bread-fruit, and fish that fell to Vailima's portion at yesterday's feast. Your wish to eat pig was greater than your wish to be a gentleman. . . . It is easy to say that you are sorry, that you wish you were dead; but that is no answer. We have lost far more than a few dozen baskets of food; we have lost our trust in you, which used to be so great, our confidence in your loyalty and high-chiefness." And so on, dwelling on the enormity of the fault and the shame that it had brought on Vailima. The punishment pronounced was that the value of the stolen food should be deducted from Fuaali's wages, and that when the whole amount was in hand, he should make a feast, to which he should invite not his own friends but the friends of those faithful servants of the house whom he had tried, but vainly, to corrupt.

Stevenson's wise and kindly rule soon began to have its effect. The 'boys' were proud of belonging to Vailima, and willing to do anything to uphold the honour of the house. When, in November 1890, they went down to a feast in Apia, they went of their own accord in the Vailima uniform—white shirt, red-and-white blazer, and lava-lava of the Stuart tartan—and formed themselves into a company instead of going each man to join his own village. Their master was highly gratified at this open declaration of their allegiance.

As soon as the difficulties connected with the

service of the house had been surmounted, the daily life of Vailima ran smoothly enough. Stevenson was usually stirring before the dawn began to break over the "down-hill profile of the eastern road," and had often been working for more than an hour when, somewhere about six o'clock, one of the 'boys' brought him a light breakfast. If the weather was cold—cold, that is, for Samoa, where a morning temperature of 70° produced a sensation of discomfort, in contrast to the greater heat of the day—he sometimes worked in bed. He used the Samoan bed of mats, with a pillow and a blanket, and sang its praises vigorously. When the weather was warm he went out on the verandah and looked with the rapture of spirit that pure and perfect beauty always aroused in him at the glories of the tropic day. By seven the whole household was astir, but Stevenson was usually left to work uninterruptedly at his writing until near eleven o'clock, when the loud booming of the pu or great conch shell blown in the verandah called the family to luncheon. Afterward came a ride or a walk, a game of tennis, or some other recreation; dinner at half-past five, then cards, music or reading, until, a little after eight, the members of the family went to their rooms. Stevenson generally read for an hour or so, but was nearly always in bed by ten o'clock.

This is an outline plan of Stevenson's day, but it was subject to so many and such great variations that the only two points which can be regarded as fairly fixed and constant are the hour of rising and

the hour of going to bed. Time had to be found for all those duties that belonged to 'Stevenson the Planter,' and often 'Stevenson the Writer,' too, became unduly importunate in his claims. When work of special interest was going on and enthusiasm and inspiration were in full tide, Stevenson would give the whole day to his writing; and even at ordinary times there were usually some hours in the afternoon or evening when he worked in one fashion or another upon the book then in progress. On the other hand, entire days were sometimes spent in long expeditions or in attendance at native festivals. There was, also, a constant stream of guests coming and going at Vailima, and when a large dinner was to be given the whole family was kept at work from early morning 'dressing the ship.' Stevenson always undertook the preparation of 'the crystal,' and was as happy as man could be polishing decanters and glasses until they reached such a state of dazzling brightness that even the silver set out on the festal table in the great hall could not outshine them.

This great hall was the centre of life at Vailima, and its master's constant pride. Its walls and ceiling were covered with varnished redwood from California, its waxed floor was bare except for the huge tiger-skin rugs which were objects of great interest to the Samoans. "I suppose," a little native boy once said to Mrs Strong, "that there are many animals like that in the forests of London." All the family treasures were collected within this great hall. There was a portrait of old Robert Stevenson

and a large picture of Skerryvore Lighthouse. There was Stevenson's portrait by Sargeant and his bust by Rodin, and Mr Colvin's portrait sent out from England. Many mementoes of the South Sea cruises were there, showing somewhat strangely against a sideboard set out with silver. A safe was built into one corner of the hall, and here money and valuables were stored; and the natives firmly believed that within this safe dwelt the 'Bottle Imp' on whom Stevenson's fortune depended. On his first coming to Samoa he had caused his story "The Bottle Imp" to be translated into the native language by one of the missionaries of the island, with all of whom he was on terms of cordial friendship; and it had been published in a paper issued by the London Missionary Society and read by the Samoans before it was heard of in England. It was through this story that Stevenson's native name of 'Tusitala' (Teller of Tales)—by which one of the missionaries, the Rev. J. Newell, had introduced him to the Samoans—was permanently adopted.

On Sunday evenings Stevenson conducted a religious service in the great hall. A chapter from the Samoan Bible was read, and Samoan hymns were sung; then came a prayer in English, usually one written by Stevenson, and, finally, the Lord's Prayer in Samoan. Stevenson wrote many prayers for the use of his household at Vailima, and the tone and temper of the daily life can scarcely be better indicated than by reference to his "Prayer at Morning." He prays that the round of small duties that begins

The Family and Household at Vailima

Photo J. Patrick

with the new day may be performed bravely and cheerfully, that laughter, kindness and mirth may abound with industry, and that when the day is ended tired workers may have quiet rest.

With the native population outside his own household Stevenson's position was one of weight and authority. He and his family were always careful to observe those small points of etiquette that meant so much to the Samoans, and he won their hearts as much by his thoughtful courtesy as by his active kindness. A very large part of his valuable morning hours were taken up in receiving chiefs who came to obtain help in their difficulties from the " chief house of wisdom." His ruling was accepted on political questions and on trifling local disputes. Money collected for a special purpose was entrusted to him, with a request that he would see the purpose carried out ; and in the troublous times that came in 1893 he was besieged on all sides by those who wanted news of the latest developments, and those who wanted to know what course to take to ensure their own safety. Stevenson would sigh, Lloyd Osbourne tells us, when he saw the chiefs approaching the house in their stately, solemn fashion, but he never refused to see them and, as far as he could, to help them.

In the political dissensions that divided the island Stevenson took a keen interest. He was from the beginning the friend of the deposed Mataafa, who was proclaimed a rebel in October 1891, but whom he recognized as being a man of greater ability and

higher character than Laupepa, the nominee of the allied Powers. But he was not in any sense a partisan. He aimed, in singleness of mind, at the establishment of good government in the island, and he considered that the chief obstacles to this were the two officials appointed by the Berlin Convention—the Chief Justice, a Swedish gentleman named Cedarkrantz, and the President of the Council, Baron Leufft von Pilsuch. He did everything he could to procure the withdrawal of these gentlemen, and this although he had a strong personal liking for Cedarkrantz. They on their side were equally anxious to get rid of him, and made strenuous efforts, by reports to the allied Powers of the mischievous results of his interference in Samoan politics, to obtain an order for his deportation. For a time it seemed likely that they would succeed, and Stevenson, realizing that at any moment his little kingdom might suddenly be left without a head, carefully prepared and wrote out instructions for the guidance of his family in such an event. He relates with immense enjoyment a dramatic incident that took place just when the struggle was in its acutest stage. There was a ball given in Apia—one of the balls at which almost every class of the community was represented. Stevenson was there, and Cedarkrantz, and the two greeted each other with the punctilious politeness that Samoan etiquette demanded under the circumstances. A few days before Cedarkrantz had been trying to obtain evidence against the interfering chief of Vailima

by bullying and threatening a half-white interpreter; and that very morning Stevenson had been engaged in writing one of those letters to the *Times* which had first called the attention of people in England to Samoan affairs, and in which he had stated in the plainest and most energetic terms his opinion of the influence of Cedarkrantz upon the island. Nevertheless the two found themselves later on in the evening face to face in a quadrille—the sort of quadrille that was danced in Apia, "rackety and prancing and embracatory beyond words." They both tried hard, says Stevenson, to behave with becoming dignity, but the situation was too much for them. Their eyes met, and they grinned; confidential relations were established between them; and "for the remainder of that prance we pranced for each other. Hard to imagine any position more ridiculous."

But in spite of his appreciation of such ridiculous episodes there was nothing of the detachment of the outsider in Stevenson's attitude toward Samoan politics. He quite calmly and knowingly put himself in danger of imprisonment or deportation; he risked what was dearer to him than his own safety, the well-being of the little colony he had planted and nurtured; he gave himself endless trouble and fatigue in arranging deputations, drawing up petitions, and writing letters to the *Times*; and he sacrificed ungrudgingly the time that meant bread for himself and his family. As a result of his efforts Cedarkrantz and Pilsuch were withdrawn in January

1893, but this did not end the troubles. "The triple-headed ass at home," as Stevenson called the allied Powers, still carried on the policy of the dismissed officials, and, as a consequence, the party of Mataafa rose in armed rebellion. Stevenson had laboured consistently for peace; but when, in spite of all that he could do, war broke out, that high adventurous spirit which neither years, nor ill-health, nor hardships had done anything to quell, leapt up and exulted at the sound of the trumpet. He rode with his cousin, Graham Balfour, who had come out to Vailima for a long visit, through the Mataafa villages, and marked the activity and excitement that had transformed old men into boys, and boys into steadfast warriors. "The impression on our minds," he says, "was extraordinary; the sight of . . . those ardent, happy faces whirls in my head; the old aboriginal awoke in both of us and nichered like a stallion." He chafed at his own enforced inaction; but he knew that if he allowed himself to be drawn into the struggle any power that he might otherwise have had of helping the rebels would be taken from him. Yet it was hard to keep quiet. "War is a huge *entraînement*; there is no other temptation to be compared to it, not one. We were all wet; we had been about five hours in the saddle, mostly riding hard; and we came home like schoolboys—with such a lightness of spirits, and I am sure such a brightness of eye as you could have lit a candle at!"

The war was short and inglorious. Mataafa's

forces were defeated in the first engagement. The allied Powers sent a warship with orders to suppress the insurgent chief at once, and in a few days it was all over. Mataafa was in exile, and the Mataafa villages were destroyed, the whole being accomplished with such unnecessary cruelty and outrage—tacitly, at least, if not openly, sanctioned by the white authorities—as filled Stevenson with shame and anger. There was nothing to be done, however, but submit, and Stevenson had to content himself with showing every kindness in his power to the Mataafa chiefs who had been taken prisoners. When the British man-of-war brought the chiefs to Apia, Stevenson was the first who boarded the ship to greet them. He sent down his servants loaded with baskets of food; he visited the prisoners when, having been flogged through the streets and suffered every species of insult, they were at last harboured in the foul hole that served for a jail; he brought doctors to them, and supplied them with all the comforts possible to their miserable position; he had the filthy prison cleansed. Finally, he brought the officials, through shame, to provide for them food and lodging that had some approach to wholesomeness and decency, and he laboured hard to get the decree that imposed the forfeiture of their goods reversed. To show their gratitude the chiefs invited him and his family to a native feast at the jail, and loaded them with presents. Later, they gave a more signal mark of their appreciation of his services, and of the risks

he had run in openly befriending a proscribed party. Almost as soon as they were released from prison, in September 1894, nine of them came up to Vailima for a consultation. They sat in a solemn circle on the floor of the hall, and made known their intentions to Stevenson and his assembled family. He had, they said, done much to improve their position in prison and to hasten their release, and they had been considering what they could do in return. They had decided to make, with their own hands and the hands of their families, a road from the house at Vailima as far as the public way to Apia, to bear all charges and to supply their own food while the work was going on; and Tusitala was especially notified that none of the customary 'presents' would be accepted. Mrs Strong describes how the "talking man" of the party began with the usual formal expressions and the usual Samoan composure of countenance, but when he began to speak of the love and gratitude they bore to Tusitala, of how they prayed for him and cherished the memory of his kindness, his calmness broke down, and he spoke with strong and real emotion. The whole incident touched Stevenson very deeply. Road-making was the most detested task of any in the whole island, and it was difficult to find men who, either for the desire of high wages or the fear of punishment, would undertake it. But the chiefs entered on their task with the heartiest good-will and good-humour. In a few weeks the road was finished, and was known henceforward as 'Ala Loto Alofa,'

the Road of the Loving Heart. Stevenson invited all the workers and their friends to a feast, and made to them a speech that embodies all his feeling for Samoa and his ideals and hopes for its future. "I love the land," he said. "I have chosen it to be my home while I live, and my grave after I am dead; and I love the people, and have chosen them to be my people, to live and die with."

It might seem that to rule and guide a large household, to superintend a plantation, and to take an active part in public affairs was enough to employ the time and the energies of any ordinary man. But the main business of Stevenson's life during the years at Vailima has as yet been scarcely touched upon. Through all his cares and occupations his literary work went steadily on. He was, before anything else, a writer, and it was from his writing that the income enabling him to support the great expense of his Vailima estate was gained. The plantation, in spite of his hopeful anticipations that it would in the course of five or six years provide him with an income, never became self-supporting. He had not the commercial instinct that could turn such an undertaking to profit, and he would not allow on his plantation the methods of dealing with native workers and of cutting down expenses that were practised elsewhere.

The South Sea book dragged on heavily all through 1891 and 1892. In April, as a relief from this distasteful labour, Stevenson took up again "The High Woods of Ulufanua," which had been dropped

because he thought the story on which it was founded too fantastic and extravagant. But on re-reading he fell in love with the first chapter, and decided that, for good or evil, it must be finished. He worked at it at intervals during the next five months, and by the end of September it was finished, the 'yarn,' as he put it, having been 'cured,' and the title changed to "The Beach of Falesá." *The Wrecker* was completed by the middle of November, and in 1892 began its course as a serial story in *Scribner's Magazine*. Meanwhile, at the suggestion of Mr Colvin, a selection from Stevenson's published essays was made, which appeared the next year under the title of *Across the Plains*.

In October Stevenson, moved by the unhappy state of public affairs in Samoa, and hoping to draw the attention of the people at home in England to the misgovernment that was doing so much mischief, began to write, against time, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*. It was, as he explained to Colvin, journalism rather than literature. He worked at it with the intense and honest conviction that he was fulfilling a plain duty toward the people among whom he had made his home. He looked for no profit or honour arising from it, and prophesied that its fate would be "to bloom unread in shop windows" He laboured hard, hoping to finish it by March; but May had come before the little book of two hundred and thirty-three pages was ready for publication, and he feared that it would appear just too late to be of

use. It is a sober, reasoned piece of work, the first serious attempt to unravel the tangle of Samoan politics.

The months, however, had produced other fruit besides this "weariful history." The creative power had been active, and when his piece of journalistic drudgery was finally off his hands, there were five stories planned out—two of them partly written—on which Stevenson was longing to be at work. These were *The Young Chevalier*, the plot of which had been suggested in a letter from Mr Andrew Lang; *Sophia Scarlet*, a "regular novel," the scene laid in a big South Sea plantation; "The Shovels of Newton French," a story of the Peninsular War; *The Pearl Fisher*, written in collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne; and *David Balfour*. This last story he had begun in February, when the weakness that followed an attack of Samoa colic had forced him to give himself a holiday from the "History." He "slid," as he says, into *David Balfour*, taking up the history of his hero after having "left him five years in the British Linen Company's office." At once the rapture of inception, such as he had felt on the shores of the Saranac lake at the first idea of *The Master of Ballantrae*, took hold on him. The tale interfered with his sleeping and his eating; and, in spite of the pressure of other work, before the end of the month the whole story was planned out and fifteen chapters written. This was one of the periods when political matters were specially pressing, but, in spite of all interruptions, *David*

Balfour "went skelping along." With a spell of *The Young Chevalier* interposed by way of "a holiday outing," it progressed without other interruption than those occasioned by the political business that was absorbing many hours of Stevenson's time each day; until, in July, the scrivener's cramp, which had attacked him eight years before, once more threatened him and made writing both painful and difficult. His step-daughter, Mrs Strong, came to his assistance; he dictated, and she wrote, and again the work went forward. "This is a great invention," said Stevenson, "to which I shall stick if it can be managed." Managed it was. Mrs Strong cheerfully devoted herself to his service, and from that time forward became his quick and able amanuensis, so that his literary work suffered scarcely at all, while his hand was greatly benefited by this relief from constant exertion. But he would not allow himself to depend entirely on such assistance, and when the cramp became less painful took up his own pen again. We hear of him gallantly copying out portions of *David Balfour* with his left hand, "a most laborious task," as he acknowledged. By the end of September the book was done, "and its author along with it, or nearly so." "Strange," he says, "to think of even our doctor here repeating his nonsense about debilitating climate. Why, the work I have been doing during the last twelve months, in one continuous spate, mostly with annoying interruptions, and without any collapse to mention, would be incredible in Norway. But

I *have* broken down now, and will do nothing as long as I possibly can."

An attack of illness followed, but, a pressing affair cropping up, he was able, as he said, to put it in his pocket, and go down to Apia day after day and attend to the troublesome business. His general health had indeed greatly improved, but nevertheless he sorely needed the rest that he refused to give himself, and the evil effects of this incessant work were soon to be seen. By the end of October he was all on fire once more with the idea for a new novel. He left for a time all the other schemes that he had in hand, and gave his days to *Weir of Hermiston.* He could think and talk of nothing else, and as the whole story shaped itself in his brain, and the characters came to life and began to play their parts, the joy of creation entirely possessed him. He had never, he said, in any other work felt so sure of himself; *Hermiston* would be his greatest book. But this first phase being passed, *Weir of Hermiston* was put on one side for other matters more immediately calling for attention. A selection of short stories dealing with the South Seas, and called *The Island Nights' Entertainment,* was to be published, and Stevenson was soon hard at work completing and retouching those he had in hand. Then there were the proofs of *David Balfour,* which was running as a serial story in *Atalanta,* and arrangements had to be made for its publication in book form under the title of *Catriona.* Toward the end of December work was

interrupted by an attack of fever followed by acute dyspepsia, and the new year opened with an epidemic of influenza which attacked eight members of the Vailima household, including its master. A hæmorrhage, though happily not a very serious one, accompanied the influenza, and recovery was slow. The illness, however, had what Stevenson called "a huge alleviation," in the shape of an idea for a new story, which was to be called *St Ives*, with a subtitle, *Experiences of a French Prisoner in England.* He could not write, so he dictated the opening chapters to 'the Amanuensis,' as he began jokingly to call Mrs Strong. So bent was he upon continuing his story, that when at one stage of his illness he was forbidden to speak for fear of a return of the hæmorrhage, he dictated by means of the deaf and dumb alphabet. Mrs Strong caught his enthusiasm, and the two laboured happily together until early in February, when, with Mrs Stevenson, they started out for 'a month's lark,' which took the form of a voyage to Sydney and a stay of two or three weeks there. It was hoped that the change would re-establish Stevenson's health, but, as usual, Sydney did not suit him, and he caught a succession of colds that ended in pleurisy. The voyage home did something toward setting him up, and as soon as he reached his own "beautiful, shining, windy house," for which in the streets of Sydney he had longed, he was able to begin work once more.

Stevenson by this time was making an income

far in excess of the seven hundred pounds which he had once said was as much as anybody could possibly want. In 1892 he had earned about £4000, and there was every likelihood that 1893 would be yet more prosperous. He was not, however, free from money worries. His expenses were very great, and he found that, considerable as were his earnings, his outgoings nearly equalled them. The responsibility of his family weighed heavily upon him, and urged him on to work when he had neither the strength nor the inclination. "What I want," he said, "is the 'income' that really comes in of itself, while all you have to do is just to blossom and exist and sit on chairs." But the time for this was not yet. For a few weeks after his return to Vailima the drudgery of proof-reading occupied him, and he had, as he said, a "heart-breaking time" over the final corrections of *David Balfour*. Before this was quite finished he took up again *The Pearl Fisher*, which he now rechristened *The Ebb Tide*. This story, the grimmest that Stevenson ever wrote, had been begun in collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne, who had joined in drawing out the plan of the story, written the first four chapters and worked with Stevenson on the remaining chapters of the first half of the book. Stevenson now set to work to finish the story by himself. The work was hateful to him; he felt more strongly than any reader can do the tragic horror of those last painful pages; but the dark story must be worked out to its inevitable conclusion, and so, with stress and

suffering, the end was written. "I have spent," wrote Stevenson, "thirteen days about as nearly in Hell as a man could expect to live through." He turned for relief to a work happier and more wholesome in tone, which he had begun as far back as 1891, and which, according to his usual custom, he had put by and taken up from time to time, when the mood for it was upon him. This was a record of three generations of his own family, which he at first purposed calling *The Lives of the Stevensons,* but which finally appeared as *A Family of Engineers.* It was just at this time that war became imminent in Samoa, and for more than a month his letters make no mention of his literary work, if any such was done, but are filled with the pitiful details of a futile struggle in which, to the writer's shame, white men played but an ignoble part. In August he writes that he has been "recasting the beginning of the *Hanging Judge* or *Weir of Hermiston,*" and "cobbling on my grandfather." A little later he is "deep in *St Ives,*" and expects that this will be the next novel done. But by December the effect of hard and continuous labour had made some rest an absolute necessity. Hitherto illness had never affected his brave and happy outlook on life; but now there were signs that a deep depression was beginning to settle upon him. He grew anxious and careful, supersensitive to criticism, and apt to allow a chance wounding word to rankle within him in a way which showed that some change was affecting the kindly sweetness of his nature. Work

went heavily, and there came times when he was ready to believe that his literary gift had been finally lost. Yet he would not give himself the complete rest that, time after time, was prescribed for him. It was the old cry—money, for the sake of his family, he must have. His friends at home, Colvin and Mr Charles Baxter, recognizing the note of unaccustomed despondency in his letters, telegraphed out to him news of the great success of the Edinburgh edition of his works, which had lately been published, and which promised to afford a regular and assured income. But even this did not induce him to rest. He took up *Weir of Hermiston* once more, and dictated to Mrs Strong those wonderful chapters which show his powers at their very highest, and indicate, as most of his critics believe, that he was entering upon a fuller and richer stage in the development of his genius. Once more the fervour of inspiration returned; for months he had walked heavily, with dragging, weary feet; now once more he stepped out lightly and gallantly. He dictated, according to Mrs Strong, without pause or hesitation, "as clearly and steadily as though he was reading from an unseen book."

During all the time that he spent at Vailima Stevenson never once, as it seems, contemplated a return to England, even for a short visit, but he was constantly making plans to meet one or other of his friends at various places—Egypt, Ceylon, Honolulu, Vailima itself. Not one of these plans came to anything; his friends were busy men

who could not get away from their duties for a period long enough to take such a journey, and from the day on which he sailed on the *Ludgate Hill* he never saw one of his old companions again, except Mr W. H. Low, from whom he parted in New York. Mr Charles Baxter was on his way out to visit Vailima when he heard the news of Stevenson's death.

The loss of the comradeship which had been even more to him than it is to most men at times weighed heavily upon him; at times, also, he felt an exile's home-sickness for the land of his birth, and for "the quaint, grey-castled city, where the bells clash of a Sunday, and the wind squalls, and the salt showers fly and beat." "Did you see," he wrote to Colvin, "a man who wrote the *Stickit Minister*, and dedicated it to me, in words that brought the tears to my eyes every time I looked at them, 'Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying. *His* heart remembers how.' Ah, by God, it does! Singular that I should fulfil the Scots destiny throughout, and live a voluntary exile, and have my head filled with the blessed, beastly place all the time."[1] Yet he would never allow his friends to pity him, or to depreciate the land he had chosen for his home. "Why, you madman," he replied to some such condolences from Colvin, "I wouldn't change my present installation for any post, dignity, honour, or advantage conceivable to me. It fills the bill; I have the loveliest time."

[1] *Vailima Letters.*

His little circle at Vailima saw little of the desponding moods that had alarmed his friends at home. To them he was still the gay and tender comrade that he had always been, the eternal boy among them who kept up the zest and excitement of living. He joined in all the gaieties of Apia, and went to lunches and balls given by the officers and men of his favourite warship, the *Curaçoa*, then stationed at Samoa. He organized and took part in a paper-chase, and related with great glee how, although he followed "every false scent on the whole course," he came in third on his "little Jack, who stuck to it gallantly." "I felt myself about seventeen again," he said, "a pleasant experience." He was immensely touched and delighted by the action of the chiefs, who, throughout September, were working at the Road of the Loving Heart; and the rekindling of his interest in *Weir of Hermiston* brought him the joy of successful, happy labour that he appreciated beyond all others. On his birthday the customary native feast was held, and he entertained his guests with his own delightful courtesy.

December came, with *Weir of Hermiston* still going happily on. Monday, the third day of the month, was mail day, and all the afternoon Stevenson was occupied in writing letters to his friends at home. When, at sunset, he joined the rest of the family on the verandah he was in the gayest spirits. He talked over plans for the future, and especially about a lecturing tour in America that he was eager

to make; he joked with his wife, who had all day been oppressed by a presentiment of coming evil, and drew her to join with him in preparations for making of their evening meal a little festival. Suddenly he put both hands to his head, and cried out, "What's that?" and then, quickly, "Do I look strange?" and fell on his knees before his wife. Sosimo, his faithful attendant, came running in, and helped Mrs Stevenson to carry him into the great hall and put him into the arm-chair, where he lay unconscious, but breathing heavily. Doctors were hurriedly sent for, and two soon arrived. Everything their knowledge and skill could suggest was done, but with no avail. The master of the house, the centre and mainspring of all its activities, was dying.

Loving hands lifted the unconscious form and laid it down gently upon a bed that had been brought in and placed in the middle of the hall. As the dire news spread over the estate, awe-stricken native servants stole silently in and seated themselves in a wide semi-circle on the floor, their dark, anxious faces all turned toward their chief, the well-loved Tusitala. His wife and the other members of his family gathered in anguish round his bed, and his missionary friend, Mr Clarke, who had come hurrying to Vailima at the news of the attack, knelt and prayed aloud. The deep, painful breaths grew slower and fainter, then ceased. Robert Louis Stevenson was dead.

Silently his native servants went about the last

sad duties they owed to their dead chief. The great Union Jack that his loyal heart had loved to see floating over the walls he had built in a strange land was hauled down and placed over his body; and under that symbol of home the Scotsman who was no more an exile lay at rest. His servants each knelt and reverently kissed the dead hand of their master. Not one could be induced to take any rest all through that long, sad night. There was no loud lamentation, but their mournful faces and dejected bearing showed how heavily this loss had fallen upon them. They sat silent, or chanted in a mixture of Latin and Samoan the long, solemn prayers that the Romish Church has ordained for use in the chamber of death; till the dawn came and brought in the day on which Tusitala must be laid in his grave.

Many feet trod that morning the Road of the Loving Heart, and chief after chief brought the customary offering of a fine mat to lay upon the body of the dead. Flowers, too, were brought, brilliant tropical flowers that filled the great hall with a blaze of colour.

An old Mataafa chief, one of those who had been in prison and who had afterward helped in building the road, came among the others; and as he crouched beside the dead body of Tusitala, he lamented over him in touching words. "I am only a poor Samoan, and ignorant," he said, "others are rich and can give Tusitala the parting presents of rich, fine mats; I am poor, and can give nothing this last day he

receives his friends. Yet I am not afraid to come and look the last time in my friend's face, never to see him more till we meet with God. . . . We were in prison, and he cared for us. We were sick, and he made us well. We were hungry, and he fed us. The day was no longer than his kindness. You are great people, and full of love. Yet who among you is so great as Tusitala ? What is your love to his love ? " [1]

Near at hand the grave was being prepared. Stevenson was to be buried in the place that he himself had chosen when he knew that he could not be laid with his fathers, " where the whaups and the plovers were crying," in the bleak Scotch graveyard at home. On the top of Vaea there is a small tableland no larger than a room; and here was to be his resting-place. No path led up the steep side of the mountain, so forty of those who had gathered to offer their services were sent to hew one out with knives and axes, while a band of the Vailima servants, headed by Lloyd Osbourne, dug the grave on the summit.

The coffin, quickly made by the skilful hands of an old friend, was ready by noon, and Sosimo reverently placed the body of his master within it, posing the dead hands in the attitude of prayer. Then the tattered red ensign that had gone with him in his South Sea voyagings was laid upon the coffin, and it was borne on the shoulders of powerful Samoans up the steep path to the mountain top.

[1] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.*

The ascent was a work of almost incredible labour and difficulty, and each slow and painful step that brought them nearer to the summit tried most severely the strength of the devoted bearers. In all nineteen Europeans and about sixty Samoans assembled at the grave, where the Rev. W. E. Clarke read the Burial Service of the Church of England; and there, on the top of the mountain that had guarded his home, Robert Louis Stevenson was laid to rest.

His grave is marked by a tomb, built, in Samoan fashion, of great blocks of cement. On either side is a bronze plate. One bears in Samoan the words, "The Tomb of Tusitala." "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried."

On the other plate is written in English two verses from his own "Requiem," with his name and the date of his birth and his death:

1850 ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON 1894

Under the wide and starry sky
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

EPILOGUE: *The Writer and the Man*

THE time has not yet come for estimating Robert Louis Stevenson's influence upon English literature, or for allotting to him his permanent position in the ranks of English writers. All that is at present possible is to point out some of those qualities which constitute his claim to a place among the immortals; the final judgment must be pronounced by a later generation.

The first and most striking of these qualities is his great range and versatility. He wrote essays, plays, novels, short stories, lyrics and blank verse, fables, lay sermons, and prayers; and his work shows as great a diversity in matter and manner as in form. That the same man wrote *A Child's Garden of Verses* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; that *Treasure Island* is by the same hand as *Ordered South*; that the charming egoist who gave us *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* could pass to the grim horror of *The Ebb Tide*; that the man who keeps us chuckling as he shows us David Balfour naïvely making his way through many dangers and difficulties toward happiness and prosperity, can make our hearts hot with futile rage as we follow the House of Durisdeer to its slow-approaching, inevitable doom,—these things seem almost beyond belief; and the wonder grows as the reader recognizes that each work is in its class a masterpiece.

This extraordinary versatility of the writer is simply a reflection of the many-sidedness of the man. Stevenson's range of interests was altogether remarkable for its width and its variety. He would occupy himself fearlessly with such stupendous and baffling subjects as the mixture of good and evil in man, and for weeks the ideas to which these musings suggested would take possession of him, to the exclusion of almost every other thought. On the other hand the most trifling interest or occupation would for a time absorb all his energies. Mrs Strong tells us how once, when a fit of restlessness had made him disinclined for his ordinary occupations, she taught him how to herring-bone saddle-blankets in red worsted, and how he became so intent upon acquiring this new art that he sat at his work during every available moment of a whole day, hurrying back to it after necessary interruptions, as to some great task. He flung himself upon each new thing that came under his observation as if that alone were the object of his desires and the goal of his energies. His brain was filled with the ideas that it suggested, and every power that he had was concentrated upon the effort to make it yield to him all that it was capable of yielding. It is true that when this was done he passed on eagerly to the next thing that presented itself; so that friends whom he had inspired with his own interest were often disconcerted when they returned after a short period of absence and found that the subject they were eager to talk

about was forgotten, and a new red-hot enthusiasm installed in its place. These quick changes were not, however, due to lightness or fickleness, but rather to the intensity and concentration which carried Stevenson swiftly through all those gradations of feeling which in the case of the ordinary man are passed as distinct stages. It is little wonder, therefore, that with such a temperament Stevenson could write and write well on so many and such varied subjects.

The second striking feature of Stevenson's writing is his distinctive and finished style. He has told us with what labour this was acquired; but it is, even in his earliest works, such a perfect instrument, and wielded with such delightful ease, that but for his confession we should be tempted to think that here was the born artist, the fortunate legatee who had inherited all that his predecessors had accumulated of skill and experience, and had added to this his own natural and effective charm. He himself has defined literature as "words used to the best purpose, with no waste, but going tight round a subject," and his works show how well his practice accorded with his theory. But he added to this essential quality of conciseness those other nameless graces that make his style a delight. One reads Stevenson slowly—his stories excepted, for in these the style must wait for the second, or perhaps the third reading—as one turns a delicious morsel on the palate, loth to let the treat come too soon to an end. But this simile is too material in its

character to express adequately the pleasure that Stevenson's airily-delightful style gives to us. One sentence is so exquisitely turned that it affords a gratification comparable to that which comes from the contemplation of a perfect piece of sculpture; the next contains such a felicitous epithet that the reader's consciousness goes out to meet it with a shock of acquiescence; the humour lurks so captivatingly behind the demure words that one stands, as it were, on tiptoe to catch a glimpse of it, and, meeting it full face by some unexpected turn in the way, goes gaily on with it, treading to the measure of light-hearted laughter—only to find, after a while, that one's companion is not Humour after all, but Pathos, her twin-sister.

Yet that which even more than his wonderful style gives the peculiar charm to Robert Louis Stevenson's writing is the intimate personal relation he sets up between the reader and himself. This is true not only of his autobiographical works—though of these pre-eminently—but of almost everything that he has written. It is as if he walked beside the reader in friendly talk, with hand laid, comrade-fashion, on the other's shoulder. We learn to know Stevenson as we know few other writers; and this is probably because he knew himself so well. He had a vivid and eager interest in his own personality, and when he was a man he still held a clear remembrance of the child, the boy, and the youth that he once had been; so that he is able to make these known to his readers, and he grows

dearer to us as we see him pass from one stage to another, just as a friend whose face we can see grows dearer with the passing years. The interest that we feel in Stevenson himself even rivals the interest that we feel in his books.

If the verdict on the writer remain in suspense there can be no doubt regarding the verdict on the man. Robert Louis Stevenson's brave life has won for him a certain place in the great rank of heroes who are honoured in every land. It is no matter that, as he himself says, his battlefield was the dingy, inglorious one of the bed and the physic bottle. The cause was a fine one, and the victory splendid. The foe was one with whom all of us at some time or other must contend, though few are attacked with such persistency and fierceness as was Stevenson. We hear his cheery voice, and see him come smiling gaily from the hottest encounter, and we feel that to give way even an inch in our own small struggles, to allow our heart to be daunted or the face that we turn upon the glories of this beautiful world to be clouded, would be almost an act of treachery toward the brave and faithful soul who so gallantly defied the enemy's power to take from man the joy of living. To many of those who have tried to fight a good fight Robert Louis Stevenson's victory has come with sustaining power. "I remember," says Helen Keller, who herself has surmounted difficulties greater, perhaps, than have been surmounted by any other human being, "an hour when I was discouraged and ready to

falter. For days I had been pegging away at a task which refused to get itself accomplished. In the midst of my perplexity I read an essay of Stevenson, which made me feel as if I had been 'outing' in the sunshine. I tried again with new courage, and succeeded almost before I knew it. I have failed many times since; but I have never felt so disheartened as I did before that sturdy preacher gave me my lesson on the 'fashion of the smiling face.'" [1]

Stevenson, we are told, always held, with Sir Walter Scott, that "to have done things worthy to be written was a dignity to which no man made any approach who had only written things worthy to be read." In his humility it probably never occurred to him that he himself had "done things worthy to be written"; but he was, in the best and truest sense of the words, a man of action as well as a man of letters, and it is as such that we remember him.

[1] *The Practice of Optimism.*